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A new subspecies of *Pimelea curviflora* (Thymelaeaceae, Sect. Epallage) from Tasmania's Furneaux Group

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Abstract

Pimelea curviflora subsp. *albidiflora* Schah. & Wapstra is described to accommodate populations of *P. curviflora* R.Br. from Tasmania's Furneaux Group. The new subspecies is morphologically and geographically well separated from occurrences of subsp. *gracilis* (R.Br.) Threlfall and subsp. *sericea* (Benth.) N.G.Walsh on the Tasmanian mainland, as well as mainland Australia. A key to the three subspecies of *P. curviflora* in Tasmania is provided, with notes on their habitat and conservation status.

Introduction

The treatment of *Pimelea* in *The Student's Flora of Tasmania* (Curtis 1967) included the closely allied *P. curviflora* R.Br. and *P. micrantha* F.Muell. ex. Meisn. The distribution and habitat of *P. curviflora* in Tasmania were cited as 'widespread and locally frequent especially on the banks of streams in the north and east'. It was described as a 'slender shrub, much-branched from the base, the branches wiry, erect or ascending, 30–100 cm high, the younger parts pubescent with appressed hairs … [leaves with] upper surface glabrous, lower surface pubescent with appressed hairs … [flowers with] tube 5–9 mm long … perianth-lobes yellow'. *Pimelea micrantha* was described as a 'densely branched shrub c. 15–30 cm. high, similar to *P. curviflora* but the leaves smaller and grey-green with both surfaces silky-pubescent … [flowers with] floral tube 2–4 mm long'. Its distribution and habitat in Tasmania were cited as 'Flinders Island. Reported to be spreading as a weed in pastures'.

The recognition of *Pimelea micrantha* on Flinders Island by Curtis (1967) was based solely upon collections made in November 1953 by E. Fricke. The collections were passed to Winifred Curtis, then Senior Lecturer in Botany at the University of Tasmania; one sheet was forwarded to the National Herbarium of Victoria (MEL50706), with two sheets being transferred to the Tasmanian Herbarium following its establishment in the late 1970s (HO23131 & HO58823; Figure 1). MEL50706 was

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Figure 1. Flinders Island *Pimelea* collection by E.F. Fricke, Nov. 1953 (HO23131).

determined to be *P. curviflora* R.Br. by Jim Willis on 30 November 1953, and subsequently cited by Threlfall (1983) in her treatment of *Pimelea* in eastern Australia as *P. curviflora* R.Br. subsp. *gracilis* S.M.Threlfall var. *sericea* Benth., while HO23131 & HO58823 were determined by B.L. Rye in May 1989 to be *P. curviflora* var. *sericea* Benth., as reflected in her *Flora of Australia* treatment (Rye 1990).

Fricke's collections on Flinders Island are believed to have been from the Marshall Bay area in the island's central west, an area of low, undulating calcareous dunes. Eleven collections matching those of Fricke have been made from this area and lodged at the Tasmanian Herbarium since Fricke's time, spanning the period 1972 to 2025, sites being within 2 km of the coast and at elevations less than 20 m above sea level. Annotations and attached images indicate plants have white flowers (HO541930), with the entity a continuing presence in poor pastures in the Marshall Bay area in December 2025 (Figure 2).

The *Flora of Tasmania Online* treatment of *Pimelea* (Gray & Baker 2019) maintained the position of Curtis (1967), including both *P. curviflora* and *P. micrantha*, whilst noting that *P. micrantha* 'has been included in this current treatment under its present status pending future, critical revision of the group. The possibility arises that *P. micrantha* may not be represented in Tasmania'. The distribution of *P. micrantha* in Tasmania was cited as the Central Midlands and Flinders Island, with the following caveat: 'It is quite possible that these records are a misidentification involving forms of the very closely related *P. curviflora*'. Gray & Baker (2019) followed the lead of Entwisle (1996) in not recognising any of the six varieties of *P. curviflora* established by Threlfall (1983) and followed by Rye (1990).

The much needed 'critical revision' was undertaken by Walsh & Schulz (2020), in which the complex comprising *Pimelea curviflora* and *P. micrantha* in southeastern Australia was reassessed. Two new subspecies of *P. curviflora* were described – subsp. *fusiformis* and subsp. *planiticola* – and two previously recognised varieties raised to subspecies level, viz., *P. curviflora* subsp. *gracilis* (R.Br.) Threlfall and *P. curviflora* subsp. *sericea* (Benth.) N.G.Walsh. The latter two subspecies were the only ones reported by Walsh & Schulz (2020) as occurring in Tasmania, while the distribution of *P. micrantha* was noted as semi-arid areas of the southern mainland states (Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales), the name '*Pimelea micrantha*' having been

Figure 2. *Pimelea curviflora* subsp. *albidiflora* in pasture on the eastern side of Palana Road in the Marshall Bay area, Flinders Island (= type locality; photo: R. Schahinger, 5 Dec. 2025).

misapplied in Tasmania (de Salas & Baker 2025).

Pimelea curviflora subsp. *sericea* (Benth.) N.G.Walsh is known in Tasmania from a few sites in the Central Midlands (Figure 3a) – corresponding to the Midlands records of '*Pimelea micrantha*' noted by Gray & Baker (2019) – where it grows in grassland and grassy woodland on either Tertiary basalt or Jurassic dolerite. The earliest collection held at the Tasmanian Herbarium is from Tunbridge Tier Road, a Tony Moscal collection made in December 1984 (HO400859), though its presence as an entity other than *P. micrantha* only began to be appreciated following collections by Hans and Annie Wapstra in 2001 (HO540310; Gilfedder *et al*. 2003). In April 2016, the taxon was listed as endangered on the *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995* (Tas.) (TSPA) under the name *Pimelea* sp. Tunbridge (A.Moscal 9026) Tas Herbarium (de Salas & Baker 2015; Threatened Species Section 2016), now a recognised synonym of *P. curviflora* subsp. *sericea* (Benth.) N.G.Walsh (Walsh & Schulz 2020; de Salas & Baker 2025).

Pimelea curviflora subsp. *gracilis* (R.Br.) Threlfall, on the other hand, is well represented in the Tasmanian Herbarium, with c. 60 collections from the Tasmanian mainland (Figure 3a), the earliest a Ronald Gunn collection dating to 1839, with a solitary 1884 collection from King Island (MEL 51219). The taxon has been recorded from (mostly) moist forest on a range of substrates (e.g., Jurassic dolerite, Tertiary basalt, Mathinna sediments) at elevations up to 600 m above sea level. Collections at HO (& MEL) are generally consistent with the description provided by Curtis (1967) for *P. curviflora* R.Br., though plant heights up to 1.5(–2) m have been noted. The degree of hairiness of leaves and young branchlets can be variable but the greenish-yellow flower colour is highly consistent across its range on mainland Tasmania (MW, pers. observ.).

But what of the '*Pimelea micrantha*' collections from the Furneaux group (Gray & Baker 2019), including those of Fricke? Walsh & Schulz (2020) asserted – without discussion – that 'All Flinders Island material of *P. curviflora* at HO and MEL is subsp. *gracilis*'. This assertion is at odds with the *Pimelea* treatments of Curtis (1967), Threlfall (1983) and Rye (1990), the author in each case recognising enough points of difference in the Fricke collections from Flinders Island to attribute them to an entity other than *P. curviflora* subsp. *gracilis*. Extensive field observations by the authors between 2008 and 2025, combined with an examination of *Pimelea* collections at HO, MEL, and QVM, indicate that the '*Pimelea curviflora* subsp. *gracilis*' populations in the

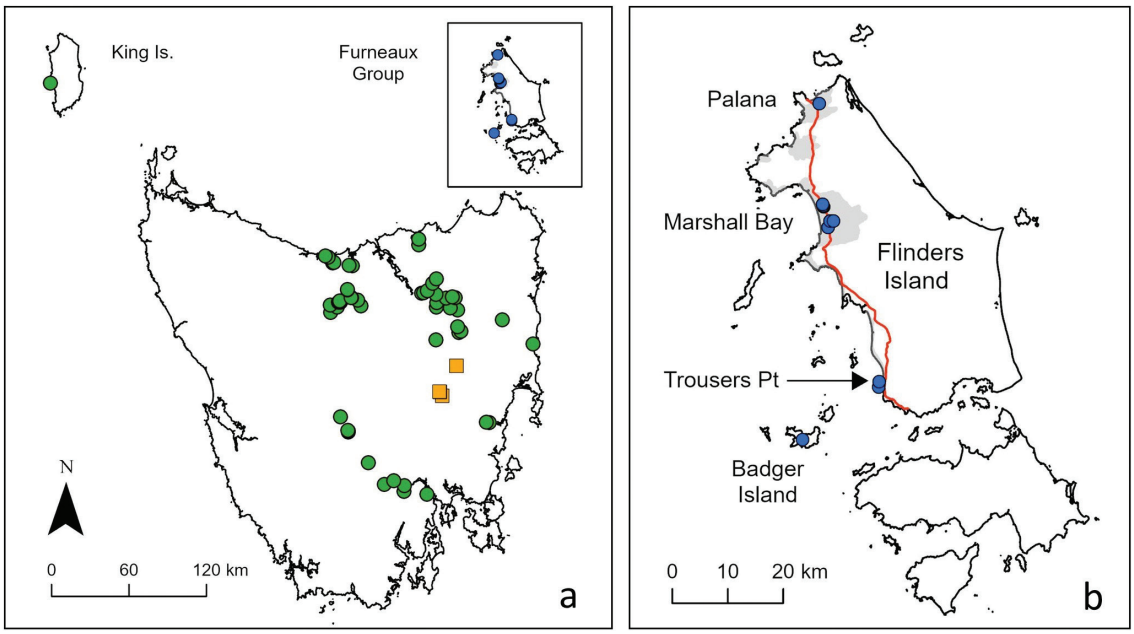

Figure 3. (a) Distribution of *Pimelea curviflora* in Tasmania (based on collections at HO, MEL and QVM): subsp. *albidiflora* (blue circles), subsp. *gracilis* (green circles), subsp. *sericea* (orange squares). (b) Furneaux Group detail: shaded areas denote the Marshall Bay land system (Pinkard & Richley 1982).

Furneaux Group and on the Tasmanian (and Australian) mainland are readily distinguished. Accordingly, the Furneaux populations are here described as *Pimelea curviflora* subsp. *albidiflora* Schah. & Wapstra, and the circumscription of *P. curviflora* subsp. *gracilis* in Tasmania restricted to the mainland populations only.

Materials and methods

Measurements were made from fresh material and collections held at HO, MEL, and QVM. Floral terminology follows Rye (1988) and Walsh & Schulz (2020), wherein the floral tube of the *Pimelea* flower is considered to be composed of an ovary-portion and a style-portion, the latter taken to be that part of the tube above the point of abscission. Elements of the floral tube are measured at the time of abscission of the style portion. Sepals refer to the four lobes extending from the top of the floral tube. Species nomenclature follows de Salas & Baker (2025).

Taxonomy

Pimelea curviflora subsp. *albidiflora* Schah. & Wapstra *subsp. nov*.

Type: AUSTRALIA. Tasmania. Flinders Island: Palana Road, c. 2.8 km north of Fairhaven Road junction. 5.xii.2025, *R. Schahinger s.n.* (holo: HO625476!; iso: MEL!).

Subshrub to c. 40 cm high, habit ranging from densely branched and rounded in exposed conditions to a more open form in shaded conditions, resprouting after physical disturbance from a woody rootstock. Younger *stems* with a dense cover of appressed white hairs to 1.5 mm long, older stems usually glabrescent. *Leaves* sub-opposite, tending to alternate distally, with very short petioles; lamina 3–8(–14) mm long, 2–3(–5) mm wide, narrow elliptic to elliptic to obovate, flat to slightly concave with an obtuse apex, lower surface moderately to densely hairy with appressed white hairs to 1.2 mm long, upper surface sparsely to moderately hairy (rarely almost glabrous). *Inflorescence* terminal and/or axillary, of compact heads of (6–)10–16(–24) flowers on a convex receptacle; involucral bracts not differentiated from leaves. *Flowers* bisexual, white to creamy-white; floral tube 3–4 mm long, circumscissile above ovary, ovary-portion persisting and falling with fruit, 2–3 mm long, style-portion 1–2 mm long with a dense covering of appressed white hairs to 0.5 mm long, glabrous internally. *Sepals* 4, widely spreading, 1.2–1.5(–2.5) mm long and 0.7–1.2(–1.5) mm wide. *Stamens* 2, inserted opposite the outer sepals, subsessile in the throat of floral tube. *Anthers* 0.5–0.6 mm long, dehiscing introrsely; style enclosed. *Ovary* 1-locular at maturity, with 1 ovule. *Fruit* dry, nut-like, ovoid, c. 2.5 mm long, tapering ±evenly to apex. *Seed* black, ovoid, 2 mm long by 1 mm wide, foveolate. **Figs 1, 2, 4a–b.**

Specimens examined: **TASMANIA**. Furneaux Group, xi.1893, *Gabriel s.n.* (MEL51234!); Flinders Is, *Ven Archdeacon Atkinson s.n.* (MEL2181358!); Flinders Island, xi.1953, *E. Fricke s.n.* (MEL50706!); Flinders Island, xi.1953, *E.F. Fricke s.n.* (HO23131!); Flinders Island, xi.1953, *E.F. Fricke s.n.* (HO58823!); Bass Strait. Flinders Island, Yirriluka, ca. 3 miles N of Emita on the western side of the road, 8.v.1966, *John Whinray s.n.* (MEL1021321!); Badger Island, Furneaux Group, *J.S. Whinray s.n.*, 3.x.1972 (MEL535430!); Trousers Point, Flinders Island, 27.x.1972, *B. Gee s.n.* (HO58821!); Palana – Killiecrankie Rd, Flinders Is., *M. Cameron s.n,* 19.xii.1975 (photo QVM!); Turn off road to Five Mile Road, Flinders Island, 18.x.1976, *M. Allan s.n.* (HO507262!); Flinders Island, Five Mile Road, 18 x.1976, *M. Allan s.n.* (HO571394!); Lughrata, Flinders Island, 10.xi.1981, *F. Duncan 521* (HO!); Palana Road, Lughrata, Flinders Island, 15.xi.1981, *F. Duncan 551* (HO!); Badger Island. 12 km SW of Flinders Island, Chappell Group, 30.xi.1986, *S. Harris s.n.* (HO108370!); Palana Road, N of Lughrata. Flinders Island, 20.x.2000, *H. & A. Wapstra s.n.* (HO541930!); Trousers Point Road, Flinders Island, 23.x.2000, *H. & A. Wapstra s.n.* (HO541933!); Flinders Island, 30.ix.2005, *S. Harris, W. Potts & E. Lazarus s.n.* (HO554978!); Near Five Mile turnoff, Flinders Island, 20.xi.2009, *A.M. Buchanan 17268* (HO!); Lughrata, Flinders Island, 17.xi.2010, *M. Taylor s.n.* (HO559776!); Marshall Bay Road, Flinders Island, 24.x.2024, *M. Wapstra 3735* (HO!); Flinders Island: Palana Road, c. 2.8 km north of Fairhaven Road junction. 5.xii.2025, *R. Schahinger s.n.* (HO625477!).

Notes: Collections of *Pimelea curviflora* subsp. *albidiflora* from the far south of Flinders Island at Trousers Point are much less hairy than those from Marshall Bay. In 1989 Rye had determined HO58821 (27 Oct. 1972) to be *P. curviflora* var. *sericea* Benth., whilst noting that its leaf vestiture was more akin to *P. curviflora* var. *gracilis*. A second collection from Trousers Point – HO541933 (23 Oct. 2000) – is similarly 'atypical', with older leaves in particular having more-or-less glabrous upper surfaces, with hairs on the lower surfaces being confined to the midrib region. The latter collection does, however, possess the defining habit and floral characters of *P. curviflora* subsp. *albidiflora,* viz.,

a comparatively short floral tube and white flowers with widely spreading sepals. Interestingly, the 1893 'Furneaux Group' collection by Gabriel (MEL51234) bears a striking resemblance to the 2000 Trousers Point collection, and indeed it is highly likely that it was collected from the same area. The collector, Joseph Gabriel, led a Victorian Field Naturalists party on an expedition to the Furneaux Group in November 1893, their initial camp being close to Trousers Point (Gabriel 1894). The main focus of the expedition was ornithological, though some

Figure 4. (a) & (b): *Pimelea curviflora* subsp. *albidiflora*; (c) & (d): *Pimelea curviflora* subsp. *gracilis*; (e) & (f): *Pimelea curviflora* subsp. *sericea*.

plant collections were made and identified later by Baron Ferdinand von Mueller, including MEL51234 as the Tasmanian endemic *P. cinerea* R.Br. (Gabriel 1894), redetermined in 1957 by Jim Willis to be *P. curviflora* R.Br.

Harris *et al*. (2001) recorded both *Pimelea curviflora* var. *gracilis* and *P. curviflora* var. *sericea* from Badger Island, though flower colour was not noted at the time (Harris, pers. comm., August 2025). Only one *P. curviflora* collection from Badger Island was lodged at the Tasmanian Herbarium by Harris (HO108370), lodged originally as *P. micrantha* F.Muell. ex. Meisn. and subsequently redetermined to be *P. curviflora* var. *sericea* Benth. by Rye in 1989. In the absence of a supporting collection, it is presumed that all the plants seen by Harris were attributable to *P. curviflora* subsp. *albidiflora*, albeit with some variability in leaf vestiture. An earlier collection from Badger Island (MEL535430: Whinray, 3 October 1972) was lodged as *Pimelea* by the collector, determined to be *P. curviflora* R.Br. subsp. *micrantha* (F.Muell.) S.M.Threlfall by D.A. Cooke in 1978, and redetermined to be *P. micrantha* F.Muell. ex Meisn. by T.J. Entwisle in 1992.

The fact that *Pimelea micrantha* F.Muell. ex. Meisn. was invoked to include collections from the Furneaux Group now attributable to *P. curviflora* subsp. *albidiflora* is perhaps not surprising given both possess densely hairy leaves (especially for younger growth) and comparatively short floral tubes (Curtis 1967). *Pimelea micrantha* is characterised by a poorly-defined style portion of the floral tube, sepals that are erect and c. 0.5 mm long, and pear-shaped fruit and seed (Walsh & Schulz 2020; VicFlora 2025). In comparison, the style portion of the floral tube for *P. curviflora* subsp. *albidiflora* is well-defined (1–2 mm long), its sepals are widely-spreading and 1.2–2.5 mm long, and its fruit and seed are ovoid (the shape and ornamentation of the seed most closely resembling *P. curviflora* subsp. g*racilis*, as per Figure 1 of Walsh & Schulz 2020).

The rank of subspecies for *Pimelea curviflora* subsp. *albidiflora* has been chosen to align with the treatment of Walsh & Schulz (2020) for the species. Given the geographic isolation of the newly described entity, it is tempting to assign it full species rank. However, in our opinion, it better fits within a broader concept of *P. curviflora*, a highly variable taxon, with other geographically isolated subspecies also recognised.

Etymology: Latin *albidus* (white) and *flos* (flower), referring to the colour of the flowers.

Suggested vernacular name: The name 'Furneaux riceflower' is suggested to reflect the subspecies' endemic distribution to the Furneaux Group of islands.

Phenology: Flowering October to December.

Distribution and habitat: Flinders Island and Badger Island in Tasmania's Furneaux Group (Figure 3a & 3b). The overwhelming majority of known plants occur on Finders Island inland of Marshall Bay in an area of c. 6 x 1 km, Palana Road forming the approximate inland limit, and extending north from Lughrata to Five Mile Jim Road, with a conservative estimate in excess of ten thousand plants. A small colony occurs in the island's far southwest at Trousers Point, with c. 300 plants (RS, pers. observ.). The taxon had been collected from near Palana in the island's far north in 1975 (QVM:1975:B:0110!), though no plants were found in roadside surveys of the area in December 2025, with little suitable habitat in evidence (RS, pers. observ.). Plant numbers on Badger Island [in 1986] were estimated to be c. 400 (Harris et al. 2001); that subpopulation's current status is unknown.

Pimelea curviflora subsp. *albidiflora* may occur on other islands in the Furneaux Group, though this likelihood is considered low given the level of past survey efforts (e.g. Harris *et al*. 2001; Harris *et al*. 2009; Harris & Reid 2011; Natural and Cultural Heritage Division 2014; and decades of informal botanical forays by various individuals).

The taxon grows in coastal shrublands and low eucalypt or sheoak woodlands on calcareous soils; often locally abundant in poor pastures, disturbed areas (such as road verges) or areas of previously cleared land regenerating naturally to scrub dominated by *Acacia longifolia* subsp. *sophorae* (Labill.) Court. Potential habitat on Flinders Island is delineated roughly by areas of Quaternary sands with limestone deposits, the so-called Marshall Bay land system (Pinkard & Richley 1982). Associated flora species include *Leptospermum laevigatum* (Gaertn.) F.Muell. (≡ *Gaudium laevigatum* (Gaertn.) Peter G.Wilson; name follows de Salas & Baker 2025), *Eucalyptus ovata* Labill. var. *ovata, Allocasuarina verticillata* (Lam.) L.A.S.Johnson, *Myoporum insulare* R.Br., *Hibbertia sericea* (R.Br. ex DC.) Benth. var. *sericea*, and *Poa poiformis* (Labill.) Druce var. *poiformis*.

Conservation status*:* The Trousers Point colony

Key to Tasmanian subspecies of *Pimelea curviflora* (Figure 4)

1 Floral tube <4 mm long; leaves usually no more than 3 times longer than wide; densely branched subshrub to c. 40 cm high; flowers white to creamy-white (drying to pale yellow); growing on calcareous substrates (TAS only: Furneaux Group)..... subsp. ***albidiflora***

1 Floral tube >4.5 mm long; leaves usually > 3 times longer than wide; subshrub to slender shrub, 20–200 cm high, branching erect; flowers yellow, greenish-yellow or sometimes reddish in part..... **2**

2 Leaves usually discolorous, sparsely hairy on lower surface and almost glabrous on upper surface; slender erect shrub, 30–150(–200) cm high; mostly occurring in moist eucalypt forest (?SA, QLD, NSW, VIC, TAS: Mainland only, presumed extinct on King Island)..... subsp. ***gracilis***

2 Leaves usually concolorous, silky hairy on both leaf surfaces; subshrub 20–30 cm high with many simple erect stems from near base; grasslands and grassy woodlands (SA, NSW, VIC, TAS: Central Midlands) ..... subsp. ***sericea***

Notes: The flower colour of *Pimelea curviflora* subsp. *albidiflora* would not have been apparent to Curtis (1967), Threlfall (1983) or Rye (1990), as in pressed collections its flowers dry to a yellowish hue (as pointed out by Hans & Annie Wapstra in their collections from Flinders Island in October 2000, viz., HO541930 & HO541933). Distributions of subsp. *gracilis* and subsp. *sericea* on mainland Australia are based upon Walsh & Schulz (2020).

occurs within Strzelecki National Park. All other known occurrences are on private land or along roadsides managed by local government or the Crown.

The primary threat to the taxon is land clearance for a range of activities, primarily agriculture or light industry (e.g., quarries and sandpits), along with other threats including competition from weeds along Palana Road (horehound, slender thistle, mignonette) and inappropriate roadside maintenance (e.g., scalping, off-target herbicide treatment). That said, the taxon is known to have maintained a presence along Palana Road since the 1950s, either in the road corridor or in adjoining rough paddocks.

At the time or writing, *Pimelea curviflora* var. *gracilis* and *P. curviflora* var. *sericea* are listed as rare (Schedule 5), and *Pimelea* sp. Tunbridge (A.Moscal 9026) Tas Herbarium as endangered (Schedule 3.2) on the *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995* (Tas.) (TSPA). The taxonomic review by Walsh & Schulz (2020) and the present recognition of the Furneaux material as a new subspecies will prompt the Tasmanian Department of Natural Resources and Environment to review the formal conservation status of these taxa through the auspices of the Scientific Advisory Committee established under the TSPA.

It is recommended that *Pimelea curviflora* subsp. *albidiflora* Schah. & Wapstra be considered for listing as vulnerable on the TSPA (Schedule 4), meeting IUCN criterion B of the IUCN Red List 3.1 criteria (2012): extent of occurrence <20,000 km^2 and area of occupancy <2,000 km^2 and known to exist at no more than 10 locations, with an inferred/projected decline in both these factors, as well as area, extent, and quality of habitat. However, it is acknowledged that additional surveys are required to determine the taxon's full extent and abundance in the Furneaux Group before a more accurate assessment of its conservation status can be made; in the interim, a status of vulnerable is suggested in recognition of ongoing threats.

Apart from recognising the correct name for *Pimelea* sp. Tunbridge (A.Moscal 9026) Tas Herbarium, viz., *P. curviflora* subsp. *sericea* (Benth.) N.G.Walsh, the status of this entity as endangered under the TSPA remains appropriate. The taxon is known from only three or four locations (Figure 3a), with a highly limited extent of occurrence (c. 50 km^2), area of occupancy (c. 0.5 ha) and number of mature individuals (fewer than 1,000), with notable ongoing threats (mainly inappropriate roadside management and weed invasion) and poor formal reservation status (Threatened Species Section 2016).

It is recommended that *Pimelea curviflora* var. *gracilis* be delisted, meaning that its nomenclature as *P. curviflora* subsp. *gracilis* (R.Br.) would not need to be recognised on the TSPA. This subspecies no longer meets the intent of 'rare and at risk', with an estimated extent of occurrence of >27,000 km^2. Estimating its area of occupancy is somewhat challenging – it is perhaps more relevant to indicate that it occurs in at least 40–50 locations (Figure 3a). The response of the species to disturbance is well-recognised by field ecologists, with the species probably in lowest abundance in less disturbed forests and highest abundance in disturbed sites where it has a propensity to colonise and proliferate. Such sites include commercial hardwood and softwood plantations (going into second and third rotations), various forms of native

forest silviculture (including clearfell, burn and sow, and different types of selective logging), firebreaks and road verges.

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