



Australian Government

Department of Climate Change, Energy,  
the Environment and Water

# Policy on managing biodiversity data collected on private land

Prepared by Environment Information  
Australia (EIA)

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## Overview

The Australian Government, through the [Declaration of Open Government](#), is committed to 'open government based on a culture of engagement, built on better access to and use of government held information, and sustained by the innovative use of technology'.

This policy forms part of the Australian Government's approach to making data more accessible, discoverable and re-useable. It provides a consistent, accountable and transparent framework for the release of biodiversity data that has been collected on private land.

An important principle is that data and information should be public by default, with restrictions placed on data only when there is a clearly identified and justifiable need to do so.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the [Policy on accessing and sharing biodiversity data](#).

## Scope

This policy relates to biodiversity data owned, held and managed by the department that is collected on private land. Biodiversity data includes, but is not limited to, occurrence records of species and other taxa, including invasive species, and information on ecological communities. The policy relates to data on all species and ecological communities, including those listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

The policy provides clarity on access to, and the release of, these data to the public, to other departments and jurisdictions, and to other parties.

## Background

The department sources the collection of a wide range of information about Australia's biodiversity. This biodiversity information is used for project and program evaluation, environmental planning and reporting, decision-making and policy development. Collected information also improves our understanding of the natural environment. Some of these data are collected on private lands. There may be particular sensitivities about such data beyond those that apply to data collected on public lands.

Involved landholders have expressed concerns about two issues: any implications for land management if observations of threatened species or ecological communities are made on their land; and any consequences of making observations of threatened species or ecological communities on their land public.

## Risk management

The department recognises there are risks in making data available to other parties and the public. For example, landholders may regard departmental knowledge of the locations of rare and threatened species occurring on their land as a risk. Similarly, public knowledge of these locations on private land could result in property incursions by enthusiasts keen to see those species. The policy

also recognises, however, that there are countervailing risks in not releasing data. Lack of knowledge of the localities of rare and threatened species or ecological communities could lead to their accidental destruction when land is cleared or its management changes, or in emergency situations. Similarly, many government schemes seek to provide funding to landholders who have threatened species or ecological communities on their land, and withholding data could limit these opportunities or hinder strategic decisions that would optimise investment outcomes.

There is a wide range of views among landholders concerning access to biodiversity data. While some landholders may seek to restrict access to records from their property, others may welcome this and wish their data to be unrestricted.

This policy acknowledges that risks to species and ecological communities may not be completely mitigated even if some data, such as precise localities, are withheld. Ultimately, the only way for a landholder to fully restrict government use of data collected from their land is for them to not participate in government programs where on-ground biodiversity data is collected. However, data sharing is strongly encouraged and this policy seeks to balance the risks.

## Uses of biodiversity data in government

Biodiversity data collected as part of Australian Government programs is used to:

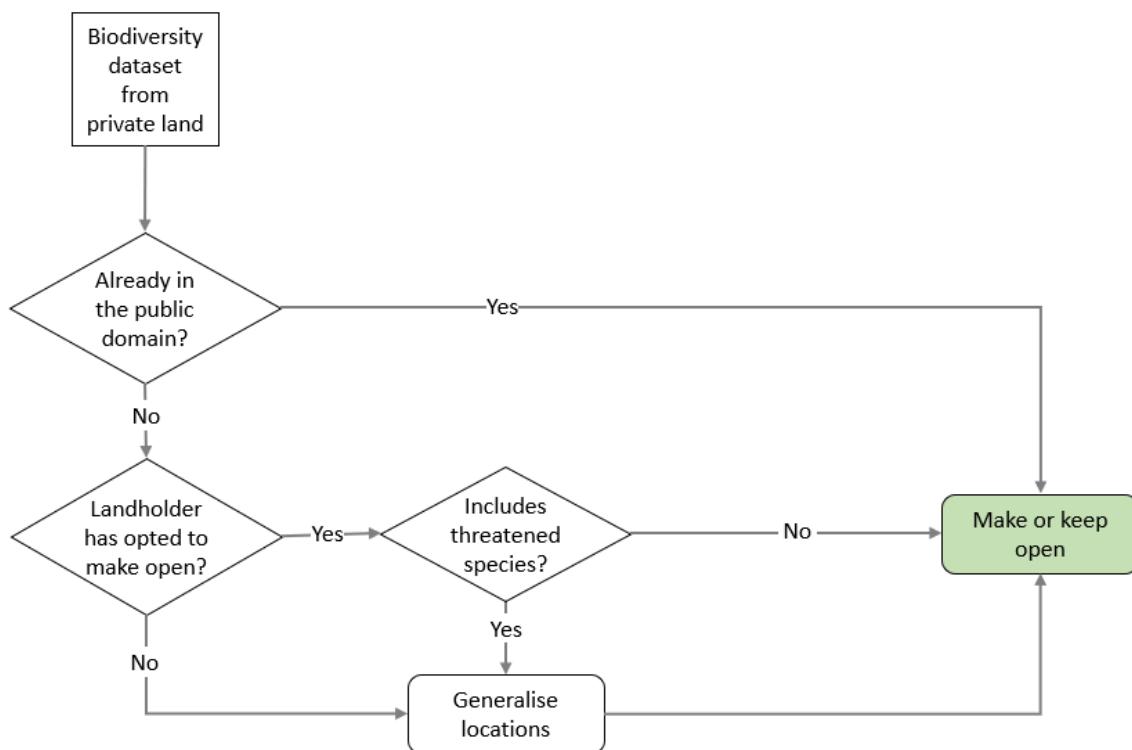
- Inform environmental policy and decision making
- Inform strategic program investment prioritisation and decision making
- Inform conservation planning and management activities, including for protected species and threatened ecological community recovery
- Build community awareness and understanding of Australia's unique natural environment, including threatened species and ecological communities
- Inform project and program evaluation, strengthening the impact and effectiveness of future on-ground interventions
- Support environmental reporting
- Support biodiversity incentive schemes (e.g., for the Nature Repair Market).

## The policy

- 1) This policy primarily impacts biodiversity data collected by third parties - such as Natural Resource Management groups - when fulfilling monitoring obligations under Australian Government-funded programs.
- 2) Biodiversity data held, owned and managed by the department that has been collected on private land will be used at full geospatial precision for government business including decision-making, planning, policy development, strategic program investment, and reporting.
- 3) Before any biodiversity data are made open to the public, the department's default position is to reduce the geospatial precision of locations on private land. Locations will be generalised to at least 10 km<sup>2</sup>, with a broader generalisation applied if the state or territory in which the record is located has a generalisation that exceeds 10 km<sup>2</sup> required for a particular species or ecological community.

- 4) Landholders may opt to allow their data to be released to the public ungeneralised; however, all records of restricted access (also known as sensitive) species will be generalised to the public if required by the state or territory where the record was observed.
- 5) If a landholder has opted out of default generalisation and the restricted-access status of a species changes (e.g., if a previously restricted-access species is deemed by a jurisdiction to be no longer restricted-access, or vice versa), then its records will be generalised or de-generalised accordingly.
- 6) Data that are already in the public domain will not be restricted.

## Decision and action tree for release or restriction of biodiversity data



## Policy version control

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