



Renewables Environmental Research Initiative (RERI) Factsheet

Supporting Australia's transition to renewable energy: targeted research, regulatory guidance, tools and data to protect biodiversity and support industry with better, faster decisions under the EPBC Act.

Standardised survey protocols and data standards for threatened species

Project description

The ecological data collected for projects being assessed or monitored under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) is often inconsistent and sometimes inadequate. This can lead to challenges for both regulation and conservation programs. For example:

- extended assessment timeframes due to requests for proponents to collect additional information
- greater potential for disputes between regulator and proponents
- insufficient survey effort resulting in more precautionary regulatory decisions.
- challenges in integrating separate and incompatible data sets to assess population trends
- limited ability for regulators to make consistent, evidence-based decisions.

We are developing guidance on ecological survey design, field survey protocols and data collection processes for over 200 priority species to help address these challenges. The project is building on the [Ecological Monitoring System Australia](#) (EMSA) by creating new protocols appropriate for environmental impact assessment and post-construction monitoring. EMSA was developed by the Terrestrial Ecological Research Network (TERN) in collaboration with the department.

This project will produce evidence-based guidance to ensure best-practice impact assessment and monitoring for threatened species. It will allow proponents to collect ecological data that meets regulatory expectations, supporting both industry and decision makers. Good quality data allows for clear, timely decisions on proposed developments. The project will also provide the data capture and delivery systems that allow ecological data from environmental impact assessments and monitoring for EPBC Act projects to flow into Australia's national Biodiversity Data Repository (BDR).

Project objective

Develop standardised ecological survey protocols and data collection processes to enable more efficient assessments and better decisions.

Fast facts

- **Investment:** ~\$2 million
- **Duration:** June 2025 – June 2026, with outputs publicly available in late 2026
- Developing survey protocols for over 200 EPBC-listed birds and bats
- Builds on existing DCCEEW EMSA project

Project deliverables

TERN will undertake literature reviews and stakeholder engagement to inform best practice survey methods, to deliver:

- survey protocols for groups of priority species
- species-specific survey protocols for species with unique survey requirements
- monitoring protocols (including for offsets)
- post-construction fatality monitoring protocols
- data collection process for all protocols.

1. Survey protocols

The existing EMSA protocols are designed to capture baseline monitoring data and track environmental changes resulting from restoration management actions. The new protocols will build on these and be specifically designed to capture data required for environmental impact assessments. The new protocols will provide instructions on how to implement survey techniques, including timing, effort and location. Users will be able to select relevant protocols based on the project's needs and the threatened species that are likely to occur in the project area.

Survey protocols for EPBC-listed birds and bats have been prioritised in this project due to the potential impacts of turbine collisions on them.

2. Monitoring protocols

Approval under the EPBC Act may require an approval holder to monitor certain species and their habitat in the project's impact or offset sites.

TERN will develop standardised monitoring protocols so that environmental changes can be tracked and those changes used to inform management practices.

3. Post-construction fatality monitoring protocols

Post-construction fatality monitoring (PCFM) is used to estimate mortality rates and assess the actual impacts of turbines on wildlife. PCFM protocols will include:

- searcher efficiency trials (to correct for missed detections when surveying for fatalities)
- carcass persistence trials (to measure the length of time carcasses remain detectable in the environment)
- unsearched area correction (a statistical adjustment to account for carcasses outside survey search sites).

Expected project outcomes

Ultimately, the project will enable faster assessments and greater certainty in decisions. It will do this by:

- setting clear and consistent expectations
- improving understanding of species through better and consistent data collection
- improving access, storage and re-use of ecological data by facilitating integration into the BDR.

Key timeframes

- **June – November 2025:** desktop research
- **November 2025 – February 2026:** engagement with state and territory regulators
- **February 2026:** Field testing
- **March – April 2026:** Public consultation via DCCEEW 'Have Your Say' platform

More information



RERI: dcceew.gov.au/environment/epbc/advice/renewable-energy-projects/reri

EMSA: emsa.tern.org.au

Contact us

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