

Biodiversity data policy

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1. Introduction

The Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority (NT EPA) is an independent statutory authority responsible for conducting environmental impact assessment (EIA) under the *Environment Protection Act 2019* (EP Act). The NT EPA supports the Northern Territory (NT) Government [Open Data Statement](#) and is committed to making biodiversity data provided for EIA purposes publicly available so it can be freely used, reused and redistributed for the benefit of the community.

Proponents undergoing EIA may need to generate biodiversity data and prepare maps and reports from flora and fauna surveys to provide to the NT EPA to support decision-making under the EP Act. Biodiversity data includes, but is not limited to, species and other taxa occurrence records, information on biodiversity conservation sites, species distributions and habitat, and sensitive and significant vegetation.

This policy statement outlines the NT EPA's approach to making biodiversity data more accessible, discoverable, and reusable; and provides a framework for sharing data in a secure, safe, lawful, and ethical manner. Biodiversity data sharing in line with FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable) and the NT Government [Open Data Statement](#) can provide significant benefits to industry, government, and the community. It can transform isolated datasets into a discoverable, actionable knowledge base to inform environmental decision-making and promote ecologically sustainable development.

The NT EPA's default position is that biodiversity data should be public, and that restrictions should not be placed on access and sharing unless there is a clearly identified and justified reason to do so.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to define the NT EPA position on the public release and reuse of biodiversity data submitted through EIA processes under the EP Act. It establishes the NT EPA's commitment to ensuring that biodiversity data is made openly accessible, discoverable, and reusable in line with statutory requirements and NTG policy. This policy sets out how data will be managed, shared, and published to support transparent environmental decision-making, promote public value, and enable responsible and ethical use of biodiversity information by government, industry, and the community.

3. Scope

This policy relates to biodiversity data that is required by the NT EPA to support and inform EIA processes and decision-making under the EP Act. This includes data for both common species, and threatened species listed under the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976* (TPWC Act), and in the case of an EIA process under the [NT Assessment Bilateral Agreement](#), threatened species listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

This policy should be read in conjunction with other NT EPA guidance documents available on the [NT EPA website](#) that provide advice on the operation of the EP Act.

4. Relevant legislation

Legislation that this policy supports includes:

- EP Act (NT)
- *Information Act 2002* (NT)
- *Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority Act 2012* (NT)

- *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976* (NT)
- EPBC Act (Cth).

5. Biodiversity databases

The Department of Lands, Planning and Environment maintains biodiversity databases in the NT, including flora and fauna databases that store and manage specimen and observation records, as well as taxonomic systems. The biodiversity databases include records from a range of sources such as NT Government (NTG) departments, the NT Herbarium, proponents, consultants, and statutory authorisation holders. Biodiversity database records are used to communicate locational information about fauna and/or flora species in the NT to the public through platforms such as [NR Maps](#), [FloraNT](#) and the [Atlas of Living Australia](#).

The biodiversity databases contain records of observations of vascular plants, mammals, reptiles, fish, frogs, birds, and invertebrates. Each record contains various details, including geographic coordinates, information regarding the source and accuracy of the record and the time a species was recorded at a particular location. The NT EPA shares biodiversity data that it receives to support EIA, with DLPE for inclusion in the databases.

6. Policy statements

6.1. Accessing and sharing biodiversity data

Policy statements in this section relate to biodiversity data that is owned, held, or managed by the NT EPA to inform EIA processes and decision-making under the EP Act.

1. The NT EPA's default position is to make data open. Biodiversity data submitted to the NT EPA will only be restricted if it cannot be legally shared, or if the risk of releasing the data is likely to be substantially greater than the risk of withholding it.
2. Any biodiversity data submitted to the NT EPA is shared with the NT Government (NTG) Department of Lands Planning and Environment (DLPE) under an appropriate Creative Commons licence.
3. Any legal or other restrictions on sharing biodiversity data submitted to the NT EPA will be adhered to. However, the NT EPA may seek to renegotiate restrictions in the interests of open data.
4. Biodiversity data that are already in the public domain or that must be included on the public register under section 284 of the EP Act will not be restricted.
5. The NT EPA will give attribution to the providers of biodiversity data where required.
6. Where possible, all associated metadata will accompany biodiversity data when it is made available to others.
7. The NT EPA will maintain records of any decisions to withhold biodiversity data from publication or modify (generalise) sensitive biodiversity data prior to release. Data that is deemed to be confidential information under section 282 of the EP Act will not be published but will be shared with relevant government authorities invited to make a submission during an EIA process.
8. If sensitive species data needs to be generalised prior to release, this will be done in accordance with the [Sensitive flora and fauna data policy](#) maintained by DLPE.
9. If the sensitive species status of a species changes (e.g. if a species previously listed on the NT Sensitive Species List is deemed to be no longer sensitive, or vice versa) then its records will be generalised or de-generalised accordingly.

10. If biodiversity data need to be modified in any way for release, an unaltered original version will be kept and stored securely by DLPE.
11. All biodiversity data will be stored in secure systems that meet NT Government [Information and Communication Technology \(ICT\) policies and standards](#).

6.2. Biodiversity data licensing agreements

This section provides guidance on the NT EPA's preferences for licensing biodiversity data to support EIA processes under the EP Act. The policy statements in this section relate to biodiversity data owned, held, or managed by a party other than the NT EPA, who agree to provide their data to the NT EPA for use, analysis and sharing.

1. The NT EPA has adopted and will comply with the NTG Creative Commons Policy (DCDD 2019).
2. Creative Commons is the NT EPA's preferred licensing suite for publicly available information and datasets and should be used wherever possible. Releasing material under a Creative Commons licence makes it clear to users what they can or cannot do with the material.
3. Biodiversity data should, where practicable, be in the public domain. The preference of the NT EPA is for data to be provided into the public domain without restriction (CC0 1.0 Universal).
4. If it is not appropriate or possible to use a CC0 licence, the simplest Creative Commons licence (CC BY 4.0 International) should be used. Data providers should be aware of the attribution provisions of CC-BY, particularly when data from multiple providers are aggregated into a single dataset or derived product.
5. CC-BY-NC (Attribution – Non-Commercial) is not a preferred Creative Commons licence. While data providers may consider that commercial use should be excluded, compliance in practice can be difficult to achieve, especially when data are aggregated and made available to a range of third parties, some of which (e.g. environmental consultants) are commercial entities that have valid reasons to access and use biodiversity data.
6. Applications to withhold confidential information from publication under section 281 of the EP Act are subject to NT EPA approval. While the NT EPA recognises that there are instances where biodiversity data may need to be withheld, there are few circumstances where such approval would be granted.
7. Restrictions on data on-provision to third parties should be avoided. The NT EPA is required to provide data and derived products to third parties (e.g. DLPE and government authorities invited to make a submission during an EIA process). If restrictions on the on-provision of data are required, a licence should specify the circumstances where provision to third parties is allowed.
8. Copyright of datasets will remain with the data owner by default. The NT EPA will not attempt to hold copyright unless required by the data provider.

6.3. Sensitive biodiversity data

Policy statements in this section relate to sensitive biodiversity data that is owned, held, or managed by the NT EPA to inform EIA processes and decision-making under the EP Act. For the purpose of this policy statement, sensitive biodiversity data has the same meaning 'sensitive data' as defined in the DLPE [Sensitive flora and fauna data policy](#).

1. The NT EPA has adopted and will comply with the DLPE [Sensitive Flora and Fauna Data Policy](#). If there is an inconsistency between the requirements of this document and the DLPE policy, the DLPE policy will be prioritised in EIA decision-making.

2. Sensitive data is textual and/or spatial information that, if published could have a significant negative impact on a species, location (e.g. sacred site) or interest (e.g. quarantine information), and the potential negative impact of making that information freely available outweighs the benefits.
3. Access to sensitive biodiversity data will be restricted by denaturing (generalising) associated geospatial coordinates and removing any textual locational information. Denaturing can be applied to all records for a species, or a sub-set of records for a species that meet certain criteria, or individual records.
4. The level of denaturing can vary depending on how much risk is associated with providing accurate locational information for a species. Records will not be denatured if the spatial accuracy of the data is already poorer than the denature level.
5. A current list of sensitive species, data, criteria, and the level of denaturing required is provided in the NT Sensitive species list maintained by DLPE.

7. Related policies and other documents

- Chapman AD 2020, *Current Best Practices for Generalising Sensitive Species Occurrence Data*. Copenhagen: GBIF Secretariat. <https://doi.org/10.15468/doc-5jp4-5g10>.
- Darwin Core Maintenance Group 2021, *Darwin Core Standard Quick Reference Guide*. Biodiversity Information Standards (TDWG). <https://dwc.tdwg.org/terms/>
- DCDD 2019, *NTG Creative Commons policy*. Northern Territory Government, Darwin.
- Department of Corporate and Digital Development (DCDD) 2023, *Open Data Standard*. Northern Territory Government, Darwin.
- Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) 2017, [Sensitive Flora and Fauna Data Policy](#). Northern Territory Government, Darwin.
- NT EPA 2026, *Biodiversity data guidance*. NT EPA, Darwin.
- NT EPA 2026, *Guidelines for Assessment of Impacts on Terrestrial Biodiversity*. NT EPA, Darwin.
- NT EPA 2026, *Guidelines for Assessment of Impacts on Marine Biodiversity*. NT EPA, Darwin.
- NT EPA 2023, [Statement of Intent 2023-2027](#). NT EPA, Darwin.
- Office of Digital Government 2019, *NTG Geospatial positioning standard*. Northern Territory Government, Darwin.

8. Contacts for further advice

- For enquiries about biodiversity data, including sensitive flora and fauna data, contact the DLPE Flora and Fauna Division at biodiversity.dlpe@nt.gov.au or phone (08) 8995 5000.
- For enquiries about accessing environmental data contact the DLPE Land Resources Division at datarequests.dlpe@nt.gov.au or phone (08) 8999 3405.
- For enquiries about the EIA process, contact the DLPE Environmental Assessment Unit eia.ntepa@nt.gov.au or phone (08) 8924 4218.