



# The National Plan for Environmental Information

The natural environment is vital to our wellbeing and that of future generations. Our landscapes, oceans, water, atmosphere and biodiversity play an important role in the economy — from agriculture and mining to energy production and tourism — and are fundamental to our Australian identity and way of life.

To manage this natural capital responsibly, governments, industry and the community need comprehensive, trusted and timely environmental information. Good information is essential for us to make sound decisions, individually and collectively, about the major issues affecting our natural assets.

In May 2010, the Australian Government announced a new initiative, the National Plan for Environmental Information, to address the environmental information needs of the nation.

## The National Plan for Environmental Information

The National Plan for Environmental Information Initiative (the Initiative) is an Australian Government program intended to improve the quality and accessibility of environmental information for decision-making. It is being jointly implemented by the Bureau of Meteorology and the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (the Department).

The Bureau's role focuses on operational elements including Australian Government environmental information priority setting, and implementation of technical components of a functional environmental information infrastructure including the development of:

- environmental information systems
- environmental information standards
- products and services
- tools for improved data access and discovery.

The Department's role focuses on establishment elements including introducing legislation, conducting a review of Australian Government environmental information activity, establishing jointly with the Bureau a high-level advisory group to provide whole-of-government direction and identify priorities, and further develop the National Plan.

The Initiative will bring together Australian Government interests in environmental information, to build and maintain environmental information products and services that enable Australia to better manage its natural capital.

Critically, it will establish the Bureau as the central coordinating authority for environmental information to provide an institutional base for addressing the Australian Government's environmental information needs.

## Activities

In the first phase of the Initiative, from 2010 to 2014, the Bureau and the Department will undertake the following activities:

- review the efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness of existing Australian Government governance of environmental information activity
- introduce legislation to establish the Bureau as the Australian Government central coordinating authority for environmental information
- develop a National Plan for Environmental Information
- establish and implement processes to identify and prioritise requirements for environmental information across the Australian Government, including a targeted review of environmental information requirements
- develop priority national environmental information products and services
- scope the requirements for development of national environmental accounts
- develop environmental information standards to facilitate discovery, access and exchange of environmental information
- commence the development of an environmental information system to support the delivery and discovery of priority environmental information.



### Current activities

#### Australian Government Environmental Information Advisory Group

The Australian Government Environmental Information Advisory Group (the Advisory Group) was established in late 2010 to determine high-level whole-of-government priorities that require environmental information, and to guide the development of national environmental information products and services. The group is comprised of senior representatives of Australian Government agencies that use or produce environmental information in activities including policy development, research, monitoring, analysis, modelling and reporting.

#### Statement of Australian Government Priorities for Environmental Information

A challenge for the Australian Government in prioritising its environmental information needs is deciding where to focus. Developed by the Advisory Group, the Statement of Australian Government Priorities for Environmental Information provides a critical first step towards identifying these priorities. The Statement, to be published early in 2012, reflects the policy, research and operational perspectives of Australian Government agencies that depend on environmental information. The Statement provides a framework to commence more detailed priority setting across Australian Government through 2012.

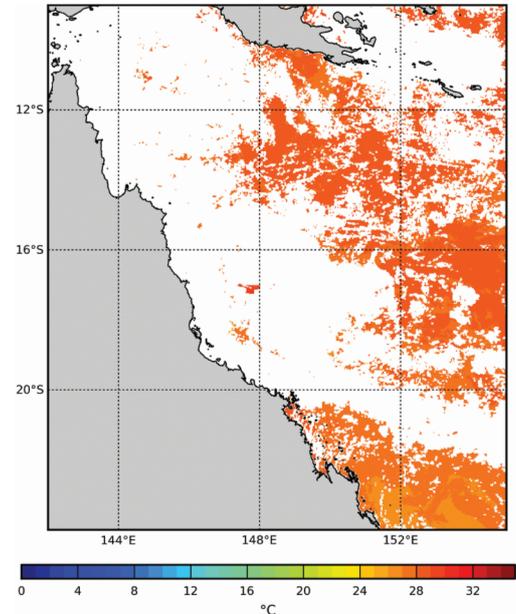
#### Independent review of Australian Government environmental information activity

The review of Australian Government environmental information activity, to be conducted in 2012, will contribute to the development of the National Plan for Environmental Information by assessing current activity and identifying opportunities for improving how the Australian Government conducts its environmental information business. Two independent reviewers have been appointed and extensive consultation will occur through 2012.

#### eReefs collaboration

eReefs, which commenced in January 2012, is a five year collaborative project that will contribute to the protection and preservation of the iconic Great Barrier Reef. It forms the first step in building comprehensive coastal information systems for Australia.

The eReefs project is a public-private collaboration between the Great Barrier Reef Foundation, the Bureau, CSIRO, Australian Institute of Marine Science and the Queensland Government, supported by funding from the Australian Government's Caring for our Country initiative, the Queensland Government, the BHP Billiton Mitsubishi Alliance, and the Science and Industry Endowment Fund.



**Figure 1. Prototype Next Generation ReefTemp image showing sea surface skin temperature (SSTskin) over the Great Barrier Reef on 20 February 2012. Captured by NOAA polar-orbiting satellites, the SSTskin retrievals are produced by the Bureau as a contribution to the Integrated Marine Observing System.**

### Planned activities

Planned activities in 2012 include:

- a collaboration with the Atlas of Living Australia and CSIRO Ecosystem Sciences to improve understanding of biodiversity monitoring requirements and capability
- commence development of the National Environmental Information Infrastructure through three key collaborative demonstrator projects
- develop a discussion paper to provide options for an Australian Environmental Accounts Conceptual Framework
- progress development of an Air Quality Information System to demonstrate the application of novel technologies and approaches for environmental information delivery.

### For more information

For further information about the Bureau's environmental information role, visit [www.bom.gov.au/environment](http://www.bom.gov.au/environment) or contact [environment@bom.gov.au](mailto:environment@bom.gov.au)