

# Restricted Access Species Data Pathways Project – FAQs

## What is the Restricted Access Species Data Pathways (RASDP) Project?

The restricted access species data pathways project (previously named Sensitive Species Data Pathways project) is an initiative supported by the Australian Research Data Commons (ARDC) and the Atlas of Living Australia (ALA), due for completion by April 2023.

It is a collaborative effort between the ALA, ARDC, Australian Government, state and territory conservation agencies, museums, and herbaria, EcoCommons and the Western Australian Biodiversity Science Institute. The project is part of Australia's research infrastructure and was designed to respond to multiple government and non-government calls to improve access to withheld or modified biodiversity data by streamlining processes and systems to enable the sharing of sensitive species (restricted access species) data for authorised / approved users. The three outputs from the project will be:

1. A national framework outlining consistent best practice guidance for sharing Restricted Access Species Data (RASD) between trusted parties and a nationally consistent method for modifying restricted access data for public release.
2. A Restricted Access Data Service (RASDS) where users can request and access sensitive data from custodians via a single point of contact.
3. A trial proof-of-concept trusted environment for using sensitive species data for modelling and analysis, developed by [EcoCommons](#).

More information about the project can be found here: [Improving access to sensitive species data – Atlas of Living Australia \(\[ala.org.au\]\(http://ala.org.au\)\)](#).

## What is restricted access species data?

Restricted access species data are biodiversity datasets that contain information that may compromise people, species, personal property or landholdings and that have some restriction over the availability of the data. Types of restricted access species data include (these are described more fully in Appendix 1):

1. **Personal Identifiable Information**
2. **Indigenous Data**
3. **Usage-Restricted Categories including:**
  - 3.1 Legal contract
  - 3.2 Legal financial
  - 3.3 Non-legal
4. **Species-Related Categories including:**
  - 4.1 Location-related data
  - 4.2 Identification data
  - 4.3 Attribute data



<sup>[1]</sup> Originally entitled "Sensitive Species Data Pathways project". The project's title was changed by the Project Working Group to avoid ongoing confusion with official government data classification nomenclature.

## What are the principles for Restricted Access Species Data recommended in the framework?

The national principles are that:

- Restricted Access Species Data should be consistently classified
- Sharing of Restricted Access Species Data should be through a negotiated legal agreement
- Handling of Restricted Access Species Data should be consistent with government requirements and the principles of FAIR and CARE
- Restricted Access Species Data should be discoverable and consistently described
- Restricted Access Species Data requests should follow a structured, transparent process
- Restricted Access Species datasets should be transformed consistently if made public or be as complete as possible if provided to approved data requestors

## Who decides which species and data are classified as restricted access?

It is primarily the state and territory conservation agencies who decide which species are classified as 'restricted access.' These lists of species include some (not all) species listed under state, territory and Commonwealth legislation as 'threatened.' The project is working towards a publicly available national list of restricted access species that will help data custodians know how to treat species records in different jurisdictions.

In addition to the state and territory lists, there are expert-elicited lists which are compiled and maintained by experts on particular groups of species, e.g. birds, frogs, plants etc.

In the case of restricted access species data types 1 to 3, it is the data custodian who decides what data is restricted, ideally consistent with the framework.

## Who is the framework for?

The framework is intended to be used by anyone who manages restricted access species data to guide them on national best practice handling of these data.

## Why isn't Indigenous Restricted Access Data considered in more detail?

The RASD project was designed to focus on biodiversity point data. Many stakeholders raised the importance of extending the project to cover cultural sensitivity. The framework is intended to be a living document and as such there is scope for future iterations of the framework to include Indigenous Restricted Access Species Data considerations in more detail after national consultation. By flagging Indigenous data sovereignty and CARE principles in the current framework, it was hoped that this will guide data custodians who adopt the framework to be cognisant that Indigenous data custodians will require consultation when sharing restricted access species data.

## What is the Restricted Access Species Data Service?

The data service - hosted by ALA - aims to provide a single place for users to discover and request Australian restricted access species data. The data service is not intended to replace existing state and territory processes for requesting data, however it aims to streamline user requests covering multiple datasets. Data custodians and data requestors can track the progress of and manage their requests via the data service. The custodianship of the data always remains with the data providers. Data providers can track and report on the use of their data via a digital object identifier (DOI).

## Does the Restricted Access Species Data Service intend to aggregate species data?

The RASDS neither transfers nor stores species data. It is simply a request workflow and tracking system for data requestors and data providers.

## If I adopt the framework, do I have to use the data service?

The data service is an opt-in only service. If you don't wish to use the service, you may continue to use your existing processes to track, monitor and field requests for restricted access species data.

## Who will use the Restricted Access Species Data Service?

Data custodians who choose to opt into the service can use the service to track and manage requests for restricted access species data that they hold. Users who want to access full-resolution restricted access species data can use the service to be able to request this data from one or multiple data custodians.

## I manage/aggregate/curate data containing restricted access species data, do I have to adopt the framework?

No, you are not obliged to adopt the framework. You may however choose to implement the best practice approaches in the framework to managing and publishing your restricted access species data so that it is nationally consistent.

## How does my organisation demonstrate that it is acting consistently with the framework?

The framework encourages organisations to publish a policy on managing restricted access species data so that the process is transparent and consistent with the framework.

## Why does the framework recommend legal agreements rather than data licence agreements when sharing RASD?

Traditionally, species data are shared under general form data licence agreements between users and data custodians.

Legal agreements between these parties are considered to offer greater protection to species, data custodians and data users.

## The framework recommends that I can't request RASD as an individual. Why?

RASD data is not for general public use and is rarely shared. Greater legal protections need to be in place before most organisations are willing to share this data. The final decision rests with the data custodians, but the framework generally recommends agreements only be made between organisations. For a student, this means that you can potentially access the data via your tertiary institution.

For the general public, the framework means that data custodians will be more willing to share obfuscated location information about RAS species.

## What is obfuscated data?

Obfuscation is the practise of hiding the exact coordinates of a record by truncating latitude and longitude or creating a polygon randomly around a point. The framework suggests a standard methodology so that all data should be obfuscated in a consistent way.

### Contacts

For further information about the project please contact: [info@RASD.org.au](mailto:info@RASD.org.au)

## Appendix 1: Restricted Access Species Data Types

1. **Personal Identifiable Information** – where the data contains names or personal details about an individual. For example, data held by a citizen science project contains personal information (names and addresses) of observers involved in the project.

2. **Indigenous Data** – for the current coverage of the framework the application of the CARE principles for Indigenous data governance (i.e. Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility and Ethics) relates to a species point dataset that has been gathered by, or contains knowledge of, Indigenous peoples. The CARE principles are intended to recognise Indigenous data sovereignty. For example, data gathered by the Australian Government Indigenous Ranger Program. This data requires permission to be sought from Indigenous peoples before use.

3. **Usage-Restricted Categories** – represent species data where the dataset is constrained by third party concerns including existing legal contracts, commercial-in-confidence concerns, or existing informal agreements relating to sharing the data.

4. **Species-Related Categories** – datasets that represent locations of species and contain information where exposure of that information in relation to a specific location has consequences. These include:

**4.1 Location-related data** – A dataset that contains species where access to information about the exact location causes sensitivity. This includes:

- i. factors such as geographically restricted distribution, life history stage, reproductive habits, feeding habits or vulnerability to human interference may compromise conservation / management efforts where that information is not already in the public domain. For example, the exact location of a critically endangered plant or animal is withheld to prevent exploitation, theft for illegal trade, vandalism, the risk of disease posed by visitation including habitat destruction.

- ii. management factors that make the record sensitive. This includes records on private land that interfere with privacy, or where the records are sensitive. To protect the plant, animal, habitat, or people, coordinates for the species are obfuscated.

For both i) and ii), an alternative to obfuscating or withholding the record, may be to accurately communicate the location but obfuscate the identification of the species, to avoid incidental damage such as to a nest tree in a forestry harvesting plan or roadside spraying and slashing.

**4.2 Identification data** – A dataset that contains species whose identification has major economic, legal or financial ramifications at a jurisdictional level, should the species name or location be exposed. For example, there are many invasive species that are spreading internationally that do not occur in Australia. These present major biosecurity risks to Australian natural resource industries such as agriculture, forestry and fisheries and Australia's unique plants and animals. Incursions of these species are dealt with swiftly and decisively, but it is important not to cause confusion over whether they are already in Australia as introduced species. Locations of incursions for these species may be withheld.

**4.3 Attribute data** – A dataset that contains information which adds additional sensitivity, for example, nest trees for bird species, an endangered eucalypt that is also a shield tree or location of pest control activities, e.g. baiting / poisoning programs. This may require similar approaches to location related data, where the location must be accurately communicated but species name is withheld or changed to avoid incidental damage such as a nest tree in a forestry harvesting plan or roadside spraying and slashing.

*This project is supported by the Australian Research Data Commons (ARDC). The ARDC is funded by NCRIS.*