

Annex

**Questionnaire on the National Clearing-House Mechanism**

**Notes:**

- ***This questionnaire should be emailed to [secretariat@cbd.int](mailto:secretariat@cbd.int) by the CBD or CHM NFP by 31 July 2016.***
- Alternatively, this questionnaire can be filled online at <https://form.jotform.com/61547081247254>.
- *The information provided in this questionnaire will be taken into account in assessing the progress made in the development of your national CHM. Your national CHM will not be assessed if this questionnaire is not completed and returned.*

<b><i>Submission date:</i></b>	31 July 2016
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<b><i>Government:</i></b>	Australia
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**1. Please summarize the evolution of your national CHM between 1 July 2015 and 30 June 2016.**

The Australian Government recognises the digital landscape is rapidly changing. Australians and citizens around the world are becoming more connected and are expecting rapid, on-demand access to information that is presented in a clear and meaningful way. There is growing digital maturity in the community and an expectation that the clearing-house mechanism (CHM) will provide spatial products for environmental information that are of a similar quality to those found through other services (for example, Google mapping products).

In order to meet these expectations of our partners and stakeholders, one key area of evolution in Australia's CHM is our focus on enhancing the geospatial context of the environmental information we provide. The overarching framework for this transition is the *Digital Spatial Strategy*, which was adopted in March 2016. This strategy recognises that *location* is an important element of environmental information and provides a roadmap that will result in a more spatially-enabled Department. It aims to do this by ensuring spatial data is born digital, is embedded into processes and helps streamline interactions with the Department. This is likely to enhance the quality and quantity of products and services we can deliver to the broader community, through the CHM, particularly when integrated with other digital CHM services (i.e. online forms for environmental impact assessment).

This distributed and agile approach to producing quality spatial products complements the policy of open data across the Australian Government. More datasets are being made publically available through the CHM (refer to question 2 below). However, open data has limitations, including datasets that must remain confidential and that not all users have the capacity to manipulate spatial data into meaningful and usable products. Therefore, open access data is complemented by a CHM with appropriate [information policies](#) and that hosts modern, up-to-date spatial products and simple spatial tools.

This approach may also improve opportunities for CHM users to move from being passive recipients of information, to active contributors of information. The Department has a strong foundation in building spatial capability of citizen scientists<sup>1</sup>, for example, through support for the [Atlas of Living Australia](#). There may be opportunities for ongoing improvement in the availability of data portals and the types of spatial data citizen scientists can submit. For example, the 'Feral Cat Scan' mobile app was released in July 2015 on the Apple iOS and Android platforms. This app allows users to record sightings and impacts of feral cats in their local area. The information gathered through this app support decision-making for managing feral cats and feeds in to public reporting, via the CHM on progress towards the targets in the Threatened Species Strategy.

These principles and strategies have directed the evolution of Australia's CHM over the last 12 months and will continue to guide longer-term implementation.

**2. Please provide a list of links to new content or online services that were created on your national CHM between 1 July 2015 and 30 June 2016.**

The content of the Australian CHM is regularly updated, to provide information and links to news, events, publications and other products. Not all changes and updates are highlighted through announcements on the 'News' page of the website, but it provides a useful cross-section of activity over the last 12 months. The 'News' page can be accessed at this URL: <http://www.environment.gov.au/news>.

Some specific examples of new content and services added to the CHM over the last 12 months include:

- [Australian National Vegetation Information System](#) (NVIS) 2016 – made available as web services and download. NVIS is a comprehensive data system that provides information on the extent and distribution of vegetation types in Australian landscapes.
- [Ecological Communities of National Environmental Significance](#) – new data product.
- [Conservation Management Zones of Australia](#) – new spatial data product.
- [Australia's first Threatened Species Strategy](#).

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, a citizen scientist is defined as a person who engages in the systematic collection and analysis of data, determination of technology, testing of natural phenomena and the dissemination of these activities by researchers on a primarily non-vocational basis. Simply, it is the involvement of anyone who is not a practising ecologist, taxonomist, or biological scientist, in the collection of environmental data.

- [Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database](#) – all versions of the database (17 year time series) now available under a Creative Commons Attribution license.
- [Sensitive Ecological Data Access and Management Policy](#)
- [Open Spatial Data Services](#) – new OGC compliant services for delivery of spatial environmental data.

In addition to these content updates, there has been ongoing refinement of the CHM’s presentation and appearance. Changes have been made to enhance the responsiveness of the website to different devices. For example, Figure 2 shows the home page in full screen/pc mode and Figure 3 shows the home page as viewed on a tablet. The content is streamlined and presented in a single column when viewed on mobile.

3. *If you have means to monitor the use of your national CHM (e.g. Google Analytics), please provide the web statistics for the visits in 2015 and the first half of 2016.*

Traffic to the Biodiversity topic area of the CHM for the period 1 January 2015 – 30 June 2016 is presented below. Note these figures look to be down on the previous reporting period. This is due to the continuing refinement of our analytics profiles. For example, we are looking at ways to exclude sessions of less than 1 second in duration, as these are generally regarded as being from non-genuine users (i.e. bots). Unfiltered numbers are shown in square brackets.

- No. of user sessions: 488,285 [1,357,616].
- Pages viewed per session: average 3.4 [1.87].
- Session duration: average 5 minutes 54 seconds [2 minutes 07 seconds].
- Domestic audience accounts for 75% of sessions. U.S.A., India, U.K., and Canada make up the top five.
- Access is dominated by desktop (69%), while mobile (21%), and tablet (10%) continue to grow.

In addition to these usage statistics for the Biodiversity section of the CHM, Table 1 and Table 2 provide figures for hits on the main spatial applications and webs services hosted on the CHM. Note they do not align with the reporting period requested, but provide a relevant snapshot.

<b>Web Application (Spatial Tool) use 2015</b>	<b>Page Loads</b>
Protected Matters Search Tool	62,746
National Conservation Values Atlas	3,417
Vegetation Group Mapping Tool	73
National Flying-fox Monitoring Viewer	2,528
<b>Total loads</b>	<b>68,764</b>

*Table 1: Web application usage statistics for the 2015 calendar year. Please note these figures are not currently available for 2016 year to date.*

<b>Web Services use</b>	<b>Number hits</b>
Australia, World Heritage Areas	88,911
Commonwealth Heritage List Spatial Database	64,279
Australia, World Heritage Areas including labels	51,323
Marine Key Ecological Features	50,923
National Heritage List Spatial Database	45,678
Commonwealth Marine Reserves	39,701
Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia Spatial Database	37,814
Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database (CAPAD) 2014	36,181
EPBC (Legislative) Referrals Spatial Database	34,737
Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar)	34,935
Commonwealth Marine Regions	30,371
Ramsar Upstream Catchments	26,622
Conservation Management Zones of Australia	23,913

<b>Web Services use</b>	<b>Number hits</b>
Commonwealth Marine Reserves symbolised on IUCN Zone	19,577
Strategic Assessment areas	14,350
Natural Resource Management Regions	6,507
Marine Key Ecological Features with names	1,599
Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia (IBRA), Version 7 (Regions & Subregions)	1,947
Indigenous Protected Areas Declared	946
Rangelands	771
Integrated Marine and Coastal Regionalisation of Australia (IMCRA)	967
<b>Total hits</b>	<b>612,052</b>

*Table 2: Hits on hosted Web Services for the first half of 2016. Data for previous years are not currently available.*

**4. If you have means to monitor the content updates of your national CHM, please provide statistical reports on these updates in 2015 and the first half of 2016.**

Content updates are not monitored in a manner that facilitates reporting at this level of detail. Content is updated on an ‘as needs’ basis, with some areas subject to very regular updates and others remaining static. The ‘Biodiversity’ area of the website is constantly updated, as there are regular developments, changes and improvements in data, policy and legislative instruments in this space.

**5. Which part(s) of the plan to improve your national CHM between 1 July 2015 and 30 June 2016 (cf. question 3 of the questionnaire sent through notification 2015-068) could not be implemented, and why?**

There was no ‘road map’ for implementation articulated in Australia’s response to 2015-068. The response stated change would occur via gradual improvements on an ‘as needs’ basis, depending on business requirements.

**6. What lessons have you learned so far in the process of developing your national CHM?**

**Some of the key lessons in Australia’s experience with its CHM to date include:**

- The CHM must be a stable and reliable platform.
- It is essential to make sure the CHM remains relevant for its users over time. This is achieved through awareness of technology trends, evolving user needs and expectations and changes in user behaviour.
- In order to be the preferred information source for users, the CHM must be responsive, offer unique information and ‘keep up’ with alternative sources of information.
- The CHM must include one or more simple pathways for users to provide feedback on their experience of the CHM and offer options for improvement.

**7. What “good practices” would you recommend to other Parties in the process of establishing or further developing their national CHM?**

The suite of good practices is broad and the most appropriate practices must be considered in the context of the technological environment, community, governance and CHM objectives. Some good practices that are likely to be relevant for most CHM developers and managers include:

- The CHM should be clear and concise. Language should be easily accessible and good use of visuals can help communicate with a broader range of people.
- The CHM should employ responsive web design, so that users on mobile devices have the same quality of experience as desktop computer users. This includes the use of touch-friendly navigation options.
- When updating the CHM, try to maintain consistency in design where possible, to avoid confusing users.

- Approach CHM content and design with search engine optimisation in mind, to help users find relevant information via external search tools, like Google.

8. *Please provide any additional relevant information related to the progress in the development of your national CHM between 1 July 2015 and 30 June 2016.*

A key part of the ongoing improvement process has been the expansion of ‘Online Services’, such as payment portals and simplified digital processes for interactions with the Department, through the CHM. These improvements reduce the need for hard copy forms (i.e. for payments and funding applications). Regarding online funding application forms, digital integration also allows links to be made between services, prompting users in real time for more information or identifying tools that may assist them complete their request.

Development over this period has also involved the continued branching out and linking of Australia’s core CHM to other complementary mechanisms that reinforce its purpose. Figure 1 illustrates how the CHM is reinforced by the various modules that sit outside its infrastructure. Some serve as vehicles to deliver messages and information to a broader audience, whilst others (i.e. social media and data portals) actually facilitate two-way communication between the Australian Government and the community. Information that is received through these other platforms is fed back in to the CHM through various means, contributing to the process of evaluation, review and improvement. The ‘[Connect with Us](#)’ webpage clearly identifies the range of linked platforms and provides a single point of access to them. Development of the CHM will continue to look at the broader suite of options to enhance engagement and consider how different modules (i.e. mobile apps) could extend the reach and the effectiveness of the CHM.

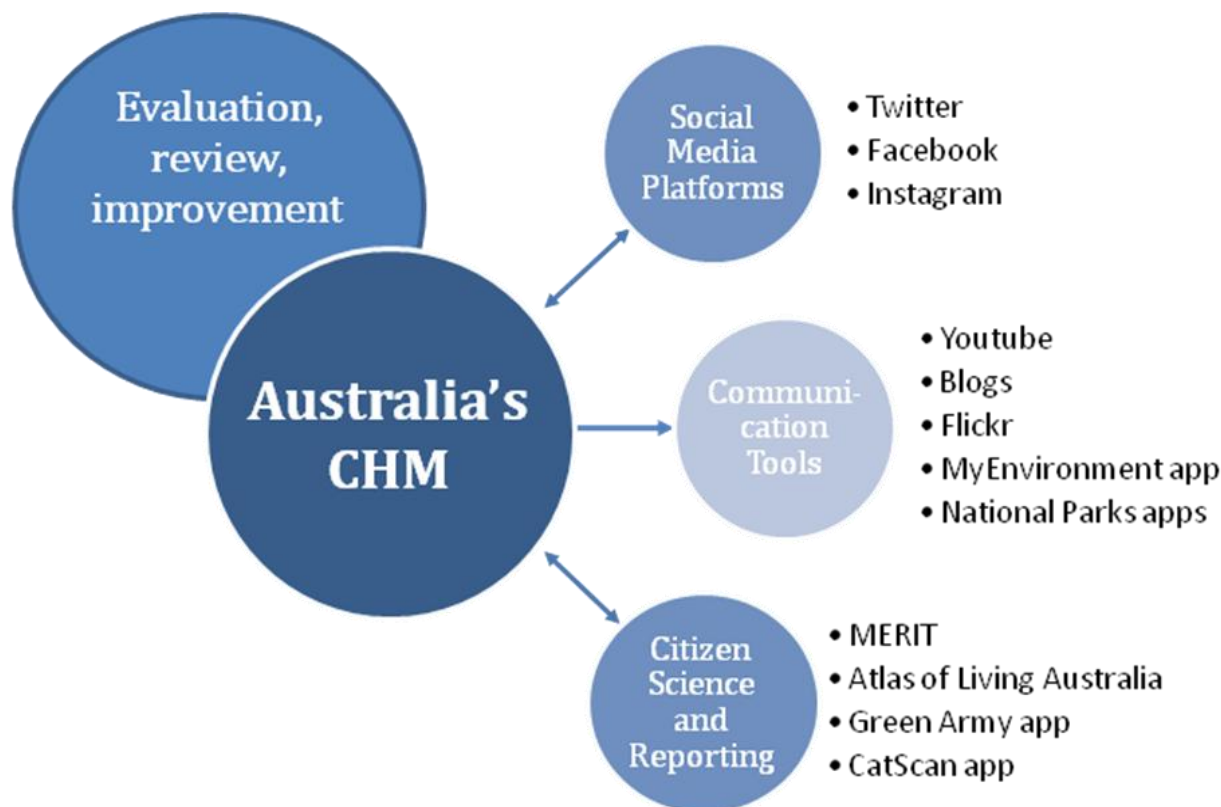


Figure 1: Snapshot of the links and relationships between the core CHM and its links to other ‘modules’ in social media, communication tools and citizen science/reporting portals.

**Case study – Australia’s Threatened Species Commissioner and social media -  
a model for engagement and integrated communication**

Australia’s Threatened Species Commissioner fills an important role in relation to community engagement and bridging the gap between the public, private sector, and government. His role is focussed on threatened species, but the Commissioner’s approach to using social media as a vehicle for communication and consultation is proving to be a successful model for a broader suite of environmental issues.

These successes with social media tools in raising awareness and promoting discussion about environmental issues have also been recognised in the ongoing refinement of the CHM design. Facebook and Twitter feeds are now embedded in CHM content and citizens are encouraged to engage with Government via these (and other) social media accounts.

Interest and support in the community is high, as reflected in the Threatened Species Commissioner’s Facebook page and Twitter feed user base of 5,331 and 4,644 people respectively.

9. *Do you authorize the CBD Secretariat to publicly share the information submitted in this questionnaire and in the previous one requested through notification 2015-068?*

Yes



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The Fund will support Australian businesses and households to take practical, direct action to reduce emissions.



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Figure 2: Department of the Environment and Energy home page – full screen PC view. Accessed 22 July 2016.



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Figure 3: Department of the Environment and Energy home page, in tablet view. Accessed 22 July 2016.