



Good Practice Note: Environment Protection

Principle 1: Do no harm

March 2016

Version	1.2
For help, contact	environment@dfat.gov.au

This Good Practice Note is for DFAT staff, delivery partners and environment specialists involved in delivering Australia's aid program. It is one of a series of notes which explains the principles of the aid program's [Environment Protection Policy](#) and how they should be addressed. The notes complement the [Operational Procedures of the Environment Protection Policy](#).

1 Doing no harm

1.1 Why do no harm?

The aid program should not harm the environment. The sustainable management of the environment is a cornerstone of long-term economic growth and social development. Environmental assets like water, soils, fisheries, heritage and biodiversity may be important to communities and their economic development. Millions of people in developing countries depend directly on the environment for their food, water, income, livelihoods and jobs.

Care should be taken to ensure that aid investments do not lead to environmental impacts that undermine their results. Unintended or poorly managed impacts on the environment can affect people's quality of life and economic opportunities. For example poorly managed water resources can affect people's health, through pollution; or economic opportunities, through depleting the resource or increasing exposure to floods.

Australia's principal national environment law, the [Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999](#) (EPBC Act) defines the environment broadly, including:

- (a) ecosystems and their constituent parts, including people and communities; and
- (b) natural and physical resources; and
- (c) the qualities and characteristics of locations, places and areas; and
- (d) heritage values of places; and
- (e) the social, economic and cultural aspects of a thing mentioned in paragraph (a), (b), (c) or (d).

Ecosystems and natural resources

In “doing no harm” you should maintain the health, diversity and productivity of ecosystems and natural resources. They sustain economic development and livelihoods and include forests and grasslands (production and natural) fisheries, water resources (surface and groundwater) soils, estuaries, coasts and oceans. Ecosystems and resources that are locally significant (such as community conservation zones) may have high conservation value, even if they are not recognised or protected by domestic laws.

Natural and cultural heritage

Negative impacts on natural and cultural heritage should be avoided – including the heritage of local communities. Heritage may be highly valued for cultural and social reasons and may be an important economic resource (for example for tourism).

Heritage includes natural and cultural assets that are valued and passed on to future generations. Cultural heritage places include significant buildings, art, archaeological sites and landscapes and traditions. Natural heritage include places of outstanding aesthetic or scientific value and places important for their biodiversity, geological features and other conservation values.

People and communities

You should protect the health, welfare and livelihoods of people including women, children, people with a disability and indigenous peoples. DFAT has separate strategies and policies for these groups, and on the displacement and resettlement of people, which outline its responsibilities and good practice in the aid program.

1.2 What are the legal obligations?

Aid program investments are subject to legal obligations to protect the environment. Environment risks and impacts of aid program investments should be assessed and managed to comply with these obligations.

The aid program must comply with the **domestic environmental laws** of the countries in which it operates.

The **EPBC Act** requires DFAT to obtain and consider the advice of the Minister for the Environment before it authorises any aid project that will have or is likely to have a significant impact on the environment anywhere in the world.

Multilateral environment agreements exist to protect certain high value conservation areas, heritage and threatened and migratory species, including from the impacts of development. Others regulate the use of hazardous substances. *Good Practice Note: Environment Protection Principle 2: Assess and manage environmental risks and impacts* lists some multilateral environment agreements that may be relevant to aid investments.

1.3 What you should do

DFAT's *Environment Protection Policy* outlines its environmental obligations and principles for environment protection. Operational Procedures (for DFAT staff) assist compliance with the Policy, setting out the steps that need to be taken at each stage of the aid management cycle.

These steps include:

- Environment risk screening and categorisation
- Environment risk assessment
- Managing environmental risks.

Good Practice Note: Environment Protection Principle 2: Assess and manage environmental risks and impacts provides more information on how to assess and manage environment risks.