

Marie Apostolou
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Australian Bureau of Statistics
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Friday 14 September, 2012

Dear Ms Apostolou,

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) was formed in 2011 to establish a formal network of organisations who are working towards implementation of the National Reserve System (NRS) through private land conservation mechanisms. Currently seven private land conservation organisations are members of the Alliance, consisting of:

- National Trust of Australia (WA),
- Nature Conservation Trust of New South Wales,
- Nature Foundation (SA),
- Queensland Trust for Nature,
- Tasmanian Land Conservancy,
- The Nature Conservancy, and
- Trust for Nature (Victoria).

A key driver behind ALCA's formation was recognition of the fact that private land conservation efforts in Australia appear fragmented across states and lack synergy. ALCA believes that more work needs to be done to develop a consistency of approach to promote, explain and execute conservation programs on private lands. Acting as a national voice for private land conservation, ALCA members together represent private landholders already responsible for protecting up to 200,000 hectares across Australia.

ALCA wishes to complement the Australian Bureau of Statistics with the preparation of the preliminary list of Essential Statistical Assets and thanks you for the opportunity to comment.

ALCA supports the Australian Government efforts to identify a core set of essential statistical assets that are critical for evidence-based decision-making, and would like to extend an offer to assist government officials in the further development of this work to ensure the statistics provide the greatest possible contribution to the development of land conservation activities in Australia.

Having read through the *Essential Statistical Assets Consultation Paper*, ALCA wishes to make the following comments:

Do you think this is a useful initiative?

The Alliance supports the development of the Essential Statistical Assets initiative as outlined in the consultation paper, with some extension of the collated data. Within this, the Alliance strongly supports the regular collation of

quality, national statistics on biodiversity conservation as a way of increasing transparency, improving decision-making, and better understanding the effectiveness of land conservation efforts.

A priority for the Alliance is the inclusion within the ESA initiative of statistics that provide a true account of the *total* extent of land protected for conservation. This includes both public and private conservation lands, and the variety of mechanisms under which they occur (e.g. conservation covenants, conservation agreements, national parks, wilderness areas, IPAs etc.). At present there exists a critical gap in information for collated, reliable data on both the extent and quality of both public and private land conservation efforts across Australia.

By providing a true account of the variety of conservation lands, the ESA initiative will enable a better understanding of the extent and effectiveness of land conservation efforts, in turn enabling more-informed conservation decision-making across Australia, and leading to better allocation of limited conservation resources.

Are the criteria adequate in identifying what is essential?

The Alliance contends that a broad view be taken in interpretation of the criteria for determining Essential Statistic Assets. In particular, this requires acknowledging the importance of statistics to non-government organisations that deliver essential services for the public good (such as biodiversity conservation on private lands), which may or may not be a specific priority for Government policy. In the case of private land conservation, this includes a need for ALCA members and all other interested parties (including local, state and federal governments, the private sector, NRM bodies, landholders etc.) to gain an accurate, long-term picture of the combined conservation estate – both across public and private lands, and across the range of protection mechanisms used in biodiversity conservation.

Are there any essential statistics you feel we have omitted? If so, why?

In general terms, the Alliance supports the preliminary list of ESA for Australia. Specifically, the Alliance welcomes regular, consistent, national reporting of protected areas as a way of informing conservation decision-making.

However, the Alliance stresses the need to include national statistics that provide information across the range of protected area types that are currently managed under a variety of different mechanisms for biodiversity conservation. Parks are only a subset of the range of protected area types that contribute to biodiversity conservation. For example, protected area types can include nature reserves, wildlife refuges, and land under conservation covenants. Moreover, protected areas are not solely on public lands. With over 70% of Australian lands in private ownership, the importance and contribution of private lands to national conservation efforts should not be underestimated. The Alliance believes a reasonable approach would be to amend the nature of key statistic ID# A906 to cover the variety of protected areas in Australia across both public and private tenures. Further detail on this is provided below.

Key statistic ID# A906 – Size of protected terrestrial land and marine parks

Noting that the information for key statistic #A906 will be drawn from datasets within the Collaborative Australian Protected Area Database (CAPAD), in the interests of better reflecting the conservation sector in Australia, both the title and the scope of the “Size of protected terrestrial land and marine parks” statistics should be extended to also include the variety of private lands and other protected areas that are managed for biodiversity conservation.

At present, it is our understanding that CAPAD only includes information of protected areas that meet IUCN criteria. Whilst the Alliance supports CAPAD as an invaluable resource, relying solely on CAPAD for this information within the ESA omits valuable data on other protected areas around Australia that also contribute to national biodiversity conservation efforts but are not specifically IUCN compliant, such as some types of conservation protection on private lands (e.g. areas under non-permanent conservation agreements). This is extremely important information for the design of public policy and biodiversity conservation programs, where there is close interplay between private and public conservation activities, and a genuine need for long-term datasets.

Moreover, within itself, the CAPAD information also includes areas that aren't specifically designated as parks. The Alliance stresses the importance of including protected areas beyond those that are specifically designated as "parks" when pulling information out of CAPAD for the ESA initiative.

The data of the National Conservation Lands Database (NCLD)¹, hosted by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (DSEWPAC), includes critical information provided by ALCA members and others on protected conservation areas that don't necessarily meet IUCN criteria – and are thus excluded from the CAPAD dataset. Combining the data of both CAPAD and the NCLD into this key "Size of protected terrestrial land and marine parks" statistic would fill a substantial and important information gap for decision-making in biodiversity conservation in Australia.

Along with the above, ALCA also suggests amending this essential statistic from "**Size of protected terrestrial land and marine parks**" to be entitled "**Size of protected terrestrial land and marine areas.**" This would be a more inclusive title that would allow for a more comprehensive statistic that covers all types of protected areas, using data both from within CAPAD and from other databases outside CAPAD (such as the NCLD), that are not specifically parks but provide invaluable contributions to the national conservation estate.

ALCA would like to extend an offer to assist ABS officials in the design of the Essential Statistical Assets program to help ensure that the ESA aids better informed decision-making and the development of the land conservation sector in Australia.

Should you require further clarification on this submission, please contact Stephen van der Mark or Mat Hardy on (03) 8631 5888.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S van der Mark', is written over a horizontal line.

Stephen van der Mark
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Land Conservation Alliance

¹ To access the National Conservation Lands Database, go to www.environment.gov.au/metadataexplorer/explorer.jsp and type in "conservation 2010" to the Search Title field.