

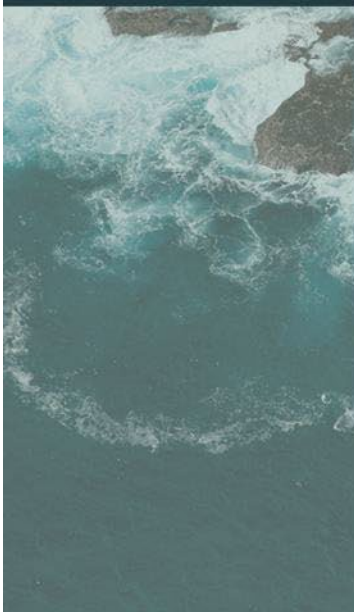
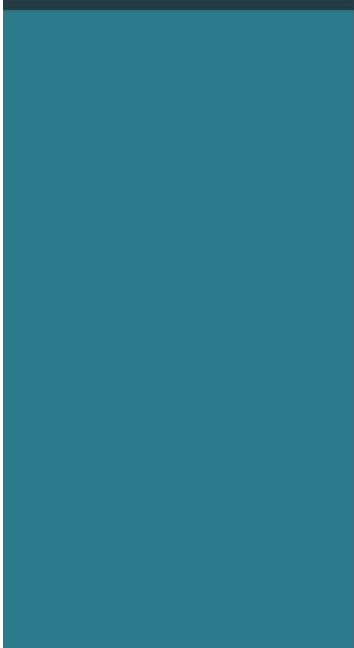
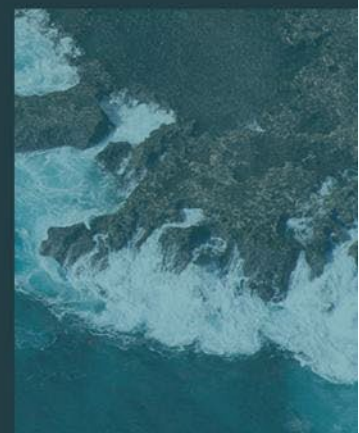
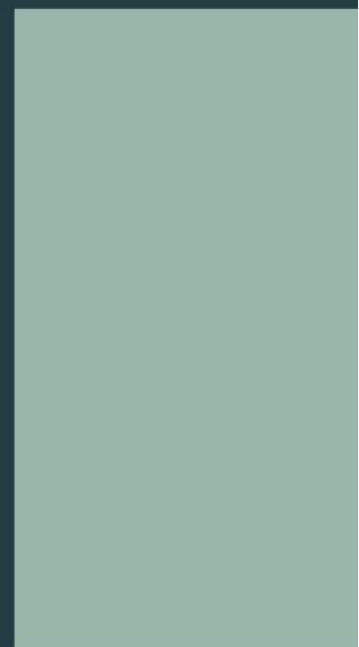


Australian Government

NATIONAL
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION
AGENCY

2025–27 Compliance and Enforcement Priorities:

Progress Report (2025–26 financial year)



About this report

This report provides a 12-month progress update on the 2025–27 compliance and enforcement priorities. It draws on compliance and enforcement cases, audits, engagement activity, intelligence, operations and related program data for 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026.

The priorities were established in 2025 and reviewed by the National EPA. They remain the focus of regulatory activity for the second year of their two-year term.

Our first 12 months

We identified five high-risk environmental compliance and enforcement issues. This report shows the action taken to address these issues, the outcomes achieved and why that work matters.

A note on the figures

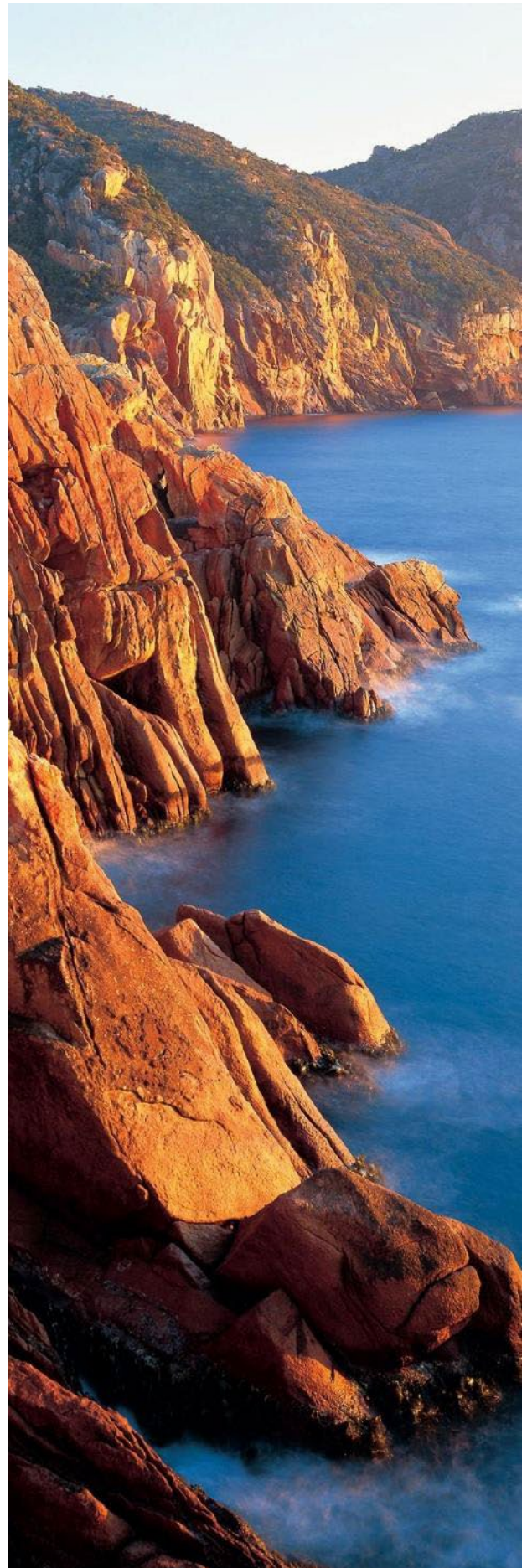
Some matters involve more than one regulatory response, and some figures come from pilot activities at a point in time. For this reason, figures should be read with their context and should not be added together unless the total is clearly stated.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' enduring knowledge and custodianship of Australia's lands, waters, plants and animals.

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© Commonwealth of Australia 2026
National Environmental Protection Agency
GPO Box 3090 Canberra ACT 2601
Telephone 1800 976 422
Web nationalepa.gov.au



FOREWORD

Turning priorities into outcomes

A regulator earns confidence by being clear about the risks it will target, taking action where it matters, and reporting openly on the results.

On 1 July 2026, the National Environmental Protection Agency assumed responsibility for compliance and enforcement of Australia's national environmental laws, including delivery of the 2025–2027 Compliance and Enforcement Priorities. It is building on established practices while strengthening the capability, powers and transparency expected of a dedicated national environmental regulator.

In 2025, five compliance and enforcement issues were identified that required sustained national attention:

- Unreferred land clearing impacting nationally protected matters.
- Non-compliance with EPBC Act project approval conditions.
- Failure to secure and manage environmental offsets.
- Unlawful waste exports and harmful ozone/synthetic greenhouse gas emissions.
- Illegal wildlife trade and associated organised criminal activity.

12 months on, this report sets out the progress made against those priorities. The results show the value of combining early engagement with intelligence-led compliance and firm enforcement. We protected land from potential clearing while investigations progressed, audited regulated projects, stopped unlawful waste exports, disrupted wildlife trafficking networks and removed financial gains linked to environmental crime.

This report also shows where further work is needed. The National EPA regulates a diverse range of activities, from land clearing to recycling and waste management. There is an opportunity to improve public understanding of how regulatory decisions, compliance activities and enforcement outcomes deter non-compliance, uphold Australia's environmental laws and contribute to environmental protection.

Our capability to detect illegal land clearing is still developing through increased use of a range of spatial information, on-ground resources and other detection methods. Equally, our compliance audit activities in a range of sectors have identified failures by proponents to adhere to approval conditions, which can obscure whether environmental harm is being mitigated. The effectiveness of some compliance strategies and their outcomes will take time to mature and be measured. We will continue to strengthen how we target, support and promote compliance across regulated sectors, including by sending clear signals to operators in breach of legislative requirements.

Transparency is part of effective regulation. Publishing this progress report makes clear what we *said* we would focus on, what we *did*, what we *achieved*, and where we will continue to *lift our effort*.



John Bradley

Chief Executive Officer

National Environment Protection Agency

AT A GLANCE

One year of targeted regulatory action

We used education, engagement, monitoring, audits, intelligence activities, investigations and enforcement to prevent harm and change behaviour.



Almost 500

live wildlife
specimens seized



\$3m+

potential black-market value of
illegal wildlife exports



59

compliance audits of
regulated projects



900+

EPBC approval conditions
assessed



\$473,380

infringements paid for approval
condition breaches



\$59,400

infringements paid for offset
failures



370+

land-use changes detected by
remote sensing



\$55m

land-clearing enforceable
undertaking imposed



1,200

recycling businesses reached
through direct advice & formal
education letters

Why the priorities matter

Our compliance and enforcement effort is not activity for its own sake. It applies across the compliance continuum: helping regulated entities understand and meet their obligations, supporting voluntary compliance, and responding proportionately when non-compliance occurs. The aim is to improve overall compliance rates while upholding the integrity of the regulatory system, preventing environmental harm, restoring or securing protected places and habitat, removing illegal profits, changing regulated behaviour and making non-compliance harder.

2025–27 COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT PRIORITY

Approved projects and environmental offsets

Approval conditions only protect the environment when they are understood, implemented and verified.

**144**

Annual Compliance Reports
assessed

**59**

Compliance audits of regulated
projects completed

**900+**

Conditions assessed

The challenge we set out to address

There are more than 30,000 individual conditions across all EPBC Act regulated projects. They can require impact avoidance, habitat protection, monitoring, rehabilitation, reporting and offsets. Failure to comply with a condition can cause direct harm or leave the regulator unable to verify whether promised environmental outcomes are being delivered.

What we did

- Assessed 144 Annual Compliance Reports to test whether approval holders were meeting their obligations.
- Completed 59 compliance audits of regulated projects across Australia and assessed more than 900 approval conditions, including conditions relating to offsets.
- Used directed variations, infringement notices, warning letters and educational letters to correct non-compliance and strengthen future delivery.
- Focused audits on weak record keeping, monitoring, third-party oversight and delayed or ineffective offset securement and management.





What changed

The compliance program moved beyond identifying paperwork failures. It exposed cases where missing baseline information, weak monitoring or unmanaged third parties meant environmental performance could not be demonstrated and harm could go undetected. Regulatory action required approval holders to correct systems, secure and manage offsets, and restore accountability for promised outcomes. Measures to redress impacts were complemented by escalating action, including infringement penalties and associated financial penalties.

Enforcement backed by restoration

Across the year, we made 15 directed variations and issued 27 infringement notices, 44 warning letters and 16 educational letters. Approval condition infringements totalling \$473,380 were paid. \$59,400 was paid for failures to implement approved offset management plans or secure offsets. Directed variations were used to strengthen obligations and put environmental outcomes back on track.

Where we will focus next

Future audits will continue to test whether risks to threatened species, ecological communities and heritage places are being managed in practice, and whether approval conditions are delivering the environmental commitments they were designed to secure.

2025–27 COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT PRIORITY

Unreferred land clearing

Clearing that should be referred under the EPBC Act can remove protected habitat before impacts are assessed, avoided or offset, leading to irreversible harm.

**380+**

Officials from co-regulators
engaged

**27**

targeted site inspections

**\$55m**

enforceable undertaking

The challenge we set out to address

We prioritised agricultural clearing with the potential to significantly affect matters of national environmental significance. The challenge is both preventative and investigative: land managers need accessible advice before clearing starts, while the regulator needs stronger capability to detect and act on clearing that is not referred.

What we did

- Led a targeted work program combining direct landholder engagement, regulator and industry outreach, site inspections and investigations.
- Engaged 385 officials from 17 federal, state and local co-regulators during 2025–26, to align approaches to EPBC Act reforms and support clear, consistent communication with peak bodies and landholders across Australia. This included delivery of a webinar to over 90 Local Land Services Land Management Officers, equipping them with EPBC Act information to support landholders on the ground.
- Provided real-time support to more than 250 landholders and associated organisations through a dedicated contact centre.
- Commenced a strategic operation in Queensland; by 30 June 2026 officers had inspected 16 of 32 sites selected for investigation, with expert advice identifying significant impacts to protected matters at 11 inspected sites.
- Undertook an additional 10 targeted site inspections across Australia to progress investigations into potential illegal land clearing.
- Piloted the Early Detection System. Its fourth pilot round identified 378 land-use changes for triage, with 15 matters moved to investigation.
- Used formal enforcement where required, including agreeing to a \$55 million enforceable undertaking with mining company Alcoa for historical land clearing that will fund permanent ecological offsets.

What changed

The work prevented further potential clearing across tens of thousands of hectares while investigations progressed, increased awareness of referral obligations and created a more proactive path to detection. The \$55 million enforceable undertaking demonstrates that enforcement can deliver enduring restoration and conservation outcomes, not simply a financial consequence.

From detection to protection

On twelve agricultural properties in western New South Wales, compliance intervention prevented a potential further clearing across 27,000 hectares while investigations continued. Across the Early Detection System pilot, about 70% of closed detections related to activities confirmed to be appropriate, such as forestry activities under Regional Forestry Agreements or provisions of the EPBC Act. This demonstrates the value of triage in directing investigative resources to matters with the greatest potential risk.

Where we will focus next

Roadshows, co-regulator briefings and engagement with the agriculture sector and Natural Resource Management groups will continue to support understanding of unreferral land clearing obligations and current and future EPBC Act reforms. We will update and develop guidance for landholders where needed, with a focus on helping people understand when referral may be required before clearing occurs.

The National EPA will continue to refine remote detection and triage capability as the Early Detection System matures and pilot results vary with seasonal conditions, imagery availability and land-use patterns. Where significant impacts are substantiated, we will progress investigations, pursue remediation or conservation outcomes, and disrupt illegal clearing.

We will also work with state and territory co-regulators to streamline assessments through changes to bilateral agreements under the EPBC Act.



2025–27 COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT PRIORITY

Waste exports and harmful emissions

Waste crime and unlawful refrigerant emissions can shift environmental and health risks across borders while giving non-compliant operators an unfair advantage.

**555 t**

waste intercepted

**21**

containers stopped

**1,200**

recycling businesses engaged

The challenge we set out to address

The priority focused on unlawful waste exports and emissions of ozone-depleting substances and synthetic greenhouse gases, particularly within the recycling sector. Risks include undeclared or unpermitted exports, poor handling of hazardous materials and unlawful discharge of controlled refrigerants.

What we did

- Delivered two waste export information sessions for more than 60 licence holders and peak body representatives, focused on licence obligations and compliance requirements.
- Engaged more than 750 Australian licensed customs brokers on their clients' waste import and export obligations, and how brokers can support compliance.
- Sent 97 education and information-request letters to waste export licence holders to support compliance with licence conditions.
- Led proactive compliance activities with the Australian Border Force under Operation Demeter, a World Customs Organization initiative targeting illicit waste and controlled-substance trade. This resulted in two directions to deal with non-compliance and 10 education and information-request letters.
- Intercepted 9 waste export consignments involving 21 containers and 555 tonnes of waste in the first half of the year.
- Conducted 14 visits to waste tyre export licence holders and domestic recycling facilities during 2026, including visits with state regulators.
- Distributed guidance to approximately 1,200 scrap metal recycling businesses, followed by targeted site visits and compliance monitoring.

What changed

The program stopped suspect exports, required corrective action, improved visibility of regulated supply chains and brought operators into compliance. A stronger field presence also improved industry engagement, reinforced co-regulator partnerships and supported enforcement action where needed. This helped maintain a level playing field for businesses that meet their obligations.

Consequences for serious and sustained non-compliance

GE Grid Australia Pty Ltd was ordered to pay a \$400,000 pecuniary penalty and \$50,000 towards the Minister's costs after the Federal Court found eight contraventions of reporting requirements over four years. In another case, Weebytes Pty Ltd received a \$19,800 infringement notice for exporting hazardous e-waste to Singapore without a permit. The container was returned to Australia and the company was required to arrange lawful disposal at its own expense.

Where we will focus next

The next phase will use insights about commercial pressures, supply-chain complexity, classification, declarations and traceability to focus monitoring on the operators and practices presenting the greatest risk.

We will continue to support entities to comply by strengthening understanding of regulatory expectations and using the tools available to us. Where operators fail to meet their obligations, we will take proportionate enforcement action.



2025–27 COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT PRIORITY

Illegal wildlife trade

Wildlife trafficking exploits Australia's unique species for profit. Effective enforcement must stop the movement of animals, expose the networks behind it and remove the financial reward.

**Almost 500**

live specimens seized

**\$3m+**

potential black-market value

**198**

INTERPOL countries alerted

The challenge we set out to address

Illegally exported wildlife can be worth many times its domestic value. Trafficking also subjects animals to cruel transport conditions, creates biosecurity risks and supports organised criminal activity across borders.

What we did

- Commenced and finalised criminal investigations, made arrests, laid charges and secured successful prosecutions.
- Seized almost 500 live specimens over the year, with a potential black-market value of more than \$3 million, and investigated more than 80 people linked to wildlife trafficking networks.
- Coordinated Australia's participation in Operation THUNDER 2025 and produced an INTERPOL Purple Notice on methods used to traffic Australian native reptiles. It was shared with all 198 INTERPOL member countries.
- Issued five intelligence alerts to border, postal and air-cargo partners. One alert led to the seizure of nine reptiles at the Melbourne Gateway Facility in September 2025.
- Worked with law enforcement partners to identify and restrain suspected proceeds of crime alongside the wildlife offending.
- Arrested six individuals for alleged illegal export or attempted export of native wildlife.
- Used intelligence information to identify the major international destinations and transit hubs for the illegal export of native wildlife.



What changed

This work intercepted animals before they reached illegal markets, strengthened detections in Australia and overseas, and raised the cost and risk of trafficking. Over the 12-month period, nine people were successfully prosecuted for 73 illegal wildlife trade offences under the EPBC Act.

Disrupting the trade and the profit behind it

In 2025–26, we disrupted a sophisticated wildlife trafficking operation that was exploiting Australia’s unique wildlife for profit. Investigators intercepted native reptiles before they could be trafficked into illegal markets, seized exotic reptiles suspected of being smuggled into the country, and restrained criminal assets worth approximately \$300,000, including cash, gold and silver bullion. Beyond the immediate seizures, the operation delivered critical intelligence on active wildlife trafficking networks and their international connections, strengthening the National EPA’s ability to identify, target and dismantle organised criminal activity threatening Australia’s wildlife.

Where we will focus next

The National EPA will continue intelligence sharing and joint investigations targeting traffickers, supply chains, concealment methods and financial pathways. This will strengthen our ability to link seizures, intelligence, prosecutions and proceeds-of-crime action to better disrupt wildlife trafficking.

NEXT 12 MONTHS

Building on the previous 12 months

The previous 12 months show meaningful progress, but our priorities are deliberately set for two years. The second year will focus on turning improved detection and intelligence into further environmental outcomes.

**Detect earlier**

Refine remote detection of land-use change and use intelligence to identify hidden or emerging non-compliance.

**Act where harm is greatest**

Prioritise matters with the highest potential impact on protected species, ecological communities, heritage, and human health.

**Secure environmental outcomes**

Use the full regulatory toolkit to stop harm, require remediation, strengthen conditions and secure offsets.

**Target financial incentives**

Continue working with law enforcement and international partners to restrain proceeds and disrupt criminal business models.

**Measure what changes**

Strengthen performance measures that show not only regulatory activity, but whether behaviour changed and environmental outcomes were achieved.

Our commitment

We will continue to publish clear information about our priorities, the action we take and the outcomes achieved. This is central to transparent, accountable and effective regulation.

