

Delivering impact by sharing Australia's biodiversity information

The Atlas of Living Australia (ALA) provides free, online access to a vast repository of information about Australia's amazing biodiversity. It's a collaborative, digital and open infrastructure that pulls together biodiversity data from multiple sources, and focuses on making biodiversity information accessible and usable.

THE CHALLENGE

Effective biodiversity research and management rely on comprehensive information about the species or ecosystems of interest. A major barrier to Australia's biodiversity research and management efforts is the fragmentation and inaccessibility of biodiversity data. Data and information on Australian species is housed across many different organisations – museums, herbaria, universities, and government departments.

Obtaining records and data sets from these groups takes considerable time and effort, and often results in incomplete information. To overcome these issues, Australia's biodiversity information needs to be brought together and made easily available in the one place.

THE RESPONSE

The ALA, a national project focused on making biodiversity information accessible and usable, is the result of a collaboration between CSIRO, Australia's museums and herbaria, universities, and the Australian Government.

Founded in 2007 on the principle of data sharing – collect it once, share it, use it many times – the ALA now provides free, online access to more than 85 million occurrence records, based on specimens from natural history collections, field observations and surveys.

The ALA features a wide range of powerful, open source mapping and analysis tools, which allow users to explore and analyse information in new ways.

This vast repository of information makes the ALA the most comprehensive and accessible data set on Australia's biodiversity ever produced.

ALA has led to a range of delivered and potential impacts, including: increased open sharing of data and standards; production of reports, papers and publications; significant efficiency gains for biodiversity data management and on-ground intervention and actions relating to biodiversity.

For every \$1 invested in the ALA there is at least \$3.5 economic value created.

THE IMPACT

There has been significant growth in the use and uptake of the ALA and it has influenced cultural change in the biodiversity data communities. As both a direct and indirect consequence of the ALA, there are new products and services generating value for research, industry, government and community groups, and increases in productivity, efficiency and innovation in various sectors across these key stakeholder groups.

The ALA Impact Evaluation indicated efficiency gains applied to Commonwealth expenditure on biodiversity and national parks to be \$26.9 million in 2016, with a benefit-cost ratio of 3.5:1¹.