



Australian Government
Geoscience Australia

Geological Collections Management Policy

Geoscience Australia

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Contents

1 Introduction	3
1.1 Purpose	3
1.1.1 Strategic alignment.....	3
1.2 Scope	4
2 Collection management lifecycle	5
3 Policy review	6
4 Definitions	7
5 Legislation and external references	8

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The *Geological Collections Management Policy* (the 'policy') provides the framework for the management of Geoscience Australia's geological collections (hereafter 'collections'). The policy sets the high-level principles to ensure these collections are managed consistently, transparently, and in line with best practice, while aligning with Geoscience Australia's strategic objectives.

This policy recognises that Geoscience Australia is a scientific organisation which maintains diverse, active, and fit-for-purpose geological collections used in applied research, display and engagement. These collections may support field programs and data acquisition activities by providing materials for analyses and are accessed by both internal staff and external stakeholders including industry, research organisations, government partners and the public. Given the operational diversity of geological collections across the organisation, this policy is supported by the Geoscience Australia *Geological Collections Management Procedure* and collection-specific standard operating procedures (SOPs) developed and maintained by the managing business areas.

The policy should be read in conjunction with the supporting procedure.

1.1.1 Strategic alignment

This policy meets Geoscience Australia's strategic objectives and operates in alignment with Commonwealth legislation and policies. In the event of any legal conflict or uncertainty, legislation and whole-of-government directions take precedence over this policy.

The policy provides the framework for consistent, transparent, and best-practice management of collections that underpin national geoscience capability and deliver national value through their contribution to scientific knowledge, economic prosperity, and evidence-based decision-making for the benefit of Australia and the preservation of irreplaceable geological records of national significance.

The policy confirms Geoscience Australia's commitment that it will:

- establish a consistent and coordinated approach to the management of collections across Geoscience Australia, aligned with strategic priorities and government initiatives
- define clear responsibilities and accountabilities for the custodianship and management of collections throughout their lifecycle
- ensure collections are well-preserved, accessible, and used to support scientific research, operational activities, and national value
- embed ethical, culturally sensitive, and risk-informed practices into collections governance
- ensure workplace health and safety and security risks are identified and managed across the collection management lifecycle
- support continuous improvement through the development of aligned procedures, guidelines, and assurance mechanisms that reduce duplication, streamline processes and improve efficiencies.

1.2 Scope

This policy applies to:

- all Geoscience Australia employees including Senior Executive Service (SES) officers, and contractors
- visitors, guests and other external personnel
- all parts of the collections where geological materials have been collected or acquired by Geoscience Australia in the course of its responsibilities for meeting the Australian Government's geoscience requirements in relation to scientific research, display and engagement
- physical samples submitted to the National Offshore Petroleum Data and Core Repository (NOPDCR) under statutory and regulatory arrangements to support legislative requirements for offshore petroleum, greenhouse gas storage and other offshore resource management.

2 Collection management lifecycle

The collections management lifecycle provides a consistent framework that outlines the key stages in the stewardship of collections, from acquisition through to disposal.

Geoscience Australia's policy intent for each phase of the collections management lifecycle is as follows:

- **acquisitions and registration** – Geoscience Australia will:
 - under limited circumstances, acquire, receive or accept geological items and collections to meet its strategic objectives and legislative requirements
 - subject to operational requirements, reserve the right to refuse or decline any items and collections that do not meet its strategic objectives or legislative requirements, cannot be accommodated within available storage capacity, or that pose an unmanageable work health and safety (WHS) risk
 - register, also termed accession, all collection items in approved management systems to ensure traceability, accountability, and data integrity through a minimum defined level of metadata.
- **management and maintenance** – Geoscience Australia will:
 - store and display collections in environments suited to their long-term preservation and access needs
 - ensure collections are discoverable and accessible
 - allow the temporary loan of geological samples into and from our collections to facilitate geoscience research, engagement and promotion
 - maintain appropriate inventory records for collections and undertake valuation activities where required, to support audit and accountability requirements.
- **deaccession and disposal** – Where items are assessed as appropriate for removal, Geoscience Australia will remove items from the collection through formal and transparent processes, and with appropriate approvals. Removal may include item donation or transfer to another entity, item sale, or item destruction. Criteria for removal may include but not limited to:
 - the item lacks essential metadata (for example, spatial location) to be of scientific value and all attempts to find this information have failed
 - the item is redundant and not needed for further analysis
 - the item has degraded to the extent it has lost its integrity and is no longer useful
 - the item poses a safety risk that cannot be reasonably managed
 - the item (for example, water samples) was never intended to be kept long term.

Considerations around workplace health and safety (WHS) and security are embedded in all stages of the collection management lifecycle as follows:

- **workplace health and safety** – Geoscience Australia will:
 - identify and manage work health and safety risks associated with accessing, handling and managing collections
 - ensure staff capability and readiness to prevent and respond safely and appropriately to emergencies.
- **security** – Geoscience Australia will safeguard collections through appropriate physical, electronic, and procedural security controls.

3 Policy review

This policy is a controlled document and will be formally reviewed **as required**, including in response to:

- material changes in legislation and/or strategic direction (for example, enterprise strategy or priority initiatives)
- significant operational changes in the management of collections.

The policy sponsor and team are responsible for initiating the review and incorporating feedback from relevant stakeholders and across Geoscience Australia.

All Geoscience Australia teams responsible for managing a collection will monitor their collection management activities to ensure they align with this policy and any relevant:

- laws and regulations
- standards
- procedures and guidelines.

4 Definitions

Term	Definition
Collection	A discrete grouping of geological items and associated metadata that are thematically similar such that they may be grouped by, but not be limited to, source location, date, collector, project, item storage location, collection type, and used to manage a collection and the collection component items.
Geoscience Australia	For this policy 'Geoscience Australia' includes its predecessor entities, including but not limited to, Bureau of Mineral Resources, Geology and Geophysics (BMR), Australian Geological Survey Organisation (AGSO), Australian Surveying and Land Information Group (AUSLIG).
Item	<p>For this policy's purposes a geological item is a curated, identifiable, documented individual element of a collection. A geological item may be a single sample or specimen or may relate to a container holding multiple samples or specimens.</p> <p>The term is often used interchangeably with 'specimen' and 'sample', but may include 'record', 'data' or 'object'.</p>
Material	<p>In the context of this policy geological materials may include but not be limited to rocks, minerals, gems, soils, sediments, fossils, petroleum, oil, gas, water, biological specimens; or any product directly prepared from any of these materials for the purposes of scientific understanding, such as rock powder, a microscope slide or a thin section.</p> <p>Material is synonymous with <i>General Geology - Sample Material Class</i> in the Geoscience Australia Vocabulary Register.</p>

5 Legislation and external references

External reference	Relevance
<i>Archives Act 1983</i> (Cth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governs the preservation and access to Commonwealth records. • Applies to records of long-term value. • May apply to collection items' data or metadata as Commonwealth records under this Act.
<i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> (Cth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a legal framework to protect and manage nationally and internationally significant flora, fauna, ecological communities, and heritage places. • Relevant where collections involve specimens of protected species or are stored in areas that may affect heritage or environmental values. • Requires due diligence to ensure that item acquisition, handling, and disposal do not breach environmental protections.
<i>Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006</i> (Cth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulates petroleum exploration and development and injection and storage of greenhouse gas substances in offshore areas of Commonwealth waters. • Collections obtained under this Act have legislative requirements for retention and transfer to designated government repositories.
<i>Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986</i> (Cth) and <i>Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Regulations 2018</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulates the export of certain categories of objects of cultural significance to Australia including Australian Aboriginal, archaeological, natural science, applied science or technological objects that are not adequately represented in public collections (scientific specimens Geoscience Australia may consider loaning internationally may be classed as cultural heritage, e.g. as Class B objects). • Ensure compliance with export controls and minimise reputational risk.
<i>Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013</i> (Cth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sets governance and accountability standards for Commonwealth entities. • Applies to all collections as relevant Commonwealth property. Any disposal, transfer, or gifting must be approved by a delegate under Geoscience Australia's Accountable Authority Instructions (AAIs).

External reference	Relevance
<p><i>Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Cth)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a framework for worker health and safety. • Adherence to the Act reduces the risk of staff being injured through exposure to dangerous material and/or unsafe facilities and also reduces the risk of potential damage to the collections themselves.
<p>Relevant state and territory legislation. For example, <i>Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003 (Qld)</i> and <i>Torres Strait Islander Cultural Heritage Act 2003 (Qld)</i> <i>Heritage Act 2011 (NT)</i> and <i>Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1989 (NT)</i>; <i>National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974 (NSW)</i> and <i>Heritage Act 1977 (NSW)</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State-based laws may apply depending on item provenance. • Some collections may be subject to local cultural heritage, environmental protection, or quarantine laws. Legal advice may be needed on a case-by-case basis.