

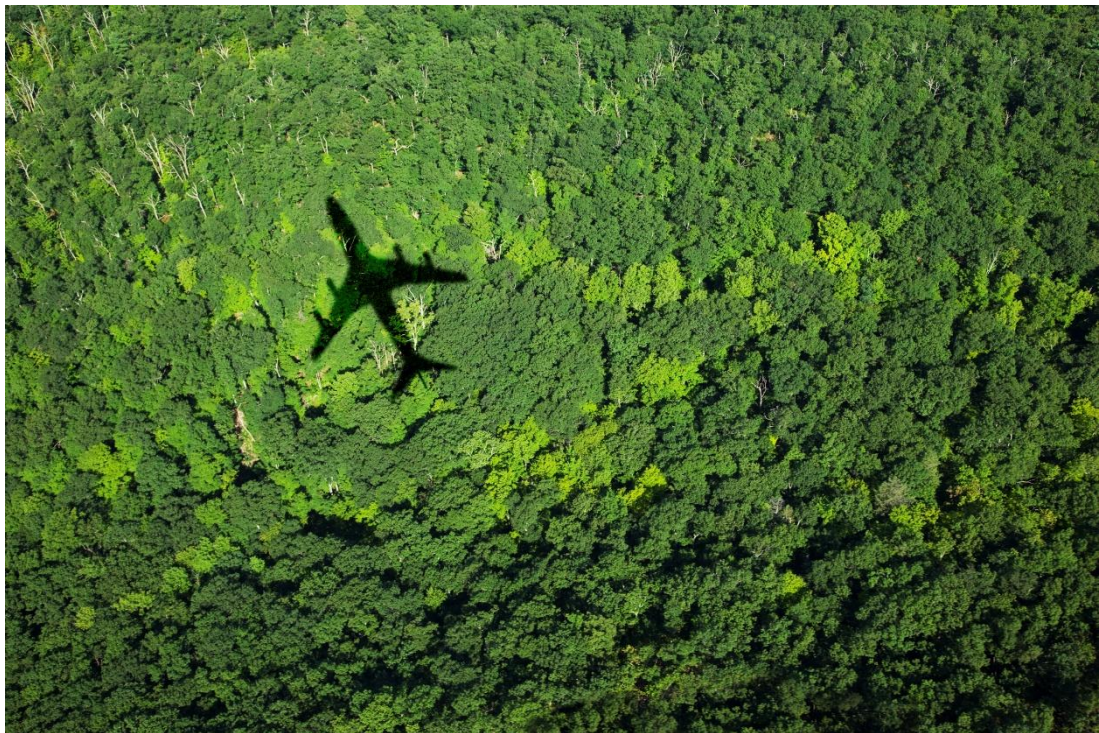


Australian Government

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts

Airport Environment Regulatory Practice Statement

September 2026



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Document control

Refer to the following table for the approver and latest version of this document.

Version	Release date	Approver	Reason for update
1.0	October 2022	Assistant Secretary, Airport Environment	Initial release of document.
2.0	September 2026	Assistant Secretary, Airport Environment	To align with updates to the Airports (Environment Protection) Regulations 2026

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Foreword

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts (the department) and its agencies provide policy advice, regulates and deliver programs, projects and services to support our regions, cities and territories.

One of our important regulatory responsibilities is protecting the environment at airports on Commonwealth land. Our airports are significant national assets. As custodians of Commonwealth land, we provide an example to all in environmental protection. Environmental management is increasingly important to Australians.

We deliver this responsibility through a regulatory framework under the *Airports Act 1996*, the *Airports (Environment Protection) Regulations 2026* and related legislation supported by our network of Airport Environment Officers.

This Airport Environment Regulatory Practice Statement sets out our approach to delivering better practice regulation of the airport environment. It communicates our expectations of regulated entities, explains our regulatory posture and provides a clear basis for consistent and transparent regulatory decision-making.

Our approach recognises that one-sized regulation does not fit all. Regulation does not operate in isolation, it is often just one aspect of Government's overall footprint on economic, environmental, and social matters.

We consider the management and protection of the airport environment, while being cognisant of our broader regulatory environment. Our operating environment includes Australian Government frameworks, through to the individual activities of those we regulate and other stakeholders.

Taking a stewardship approach to regulation sees us treat regulation as an asset that we are all responsible for protecting, developing, and improving. This includes taking a whole-of-system approach to understand how different policy, program, and regulatory levers combine for environmental benefit, while avoiding unnecessary duplication with other regulators.

To achieve our regulatory outcomes, we must respond and adapt to changes in different parts of the regulatory ecosystem. In our environmental regulation of leased federal airports, we influence behaviour by building constructive relationships that encourage voluntary compliance, helping industry address non-compliance risks, and taking proportionate regulatory action where necessary.

Our approach is: principles-based, evidence-based and data driven, outcomes focused and risk-based.

Combining these regulatory approaches ensures our regulatory efforts are fit-for-purpose and implemented in a way that minimises harm to the environment and human health, while reducing unnecessary regulatory burden. Our focus is on achieving these outcomes; improving our regulatory practice; maintaining consistent, risk-based and proportionate decision-making; and ensuring all parties understand their roles and responsibilities.

We will engage and consult with regulated entities, other regulators, Commonwealth, state and territory counterparts and the community to support transparent, informed and effective regulation.

Through this Practice Statement, Airport Environment Officers, airport operators and other regulated entities have a shared understanding of why and how we regulate. This provides the foundation for clear responsibilities, effective compliance and improved environmental outcomes at leased federal airports.



Jim Betts

Secretary

Purpose

As the environmental regulator at leased federal airports on Commonwealth land, the department regulates environmental matters at leased federal airports on Commonwealth land through its network of Airport Environment Officers (AEOs). This Airports Environment Regulatory Practice Statement (Practice Statement) sets out the governance framework and regulatory model that support this function.

It provides clarity about how regulated entities such as Airport Lessee Companies (ALCs) and other operators at airports can expect the department to undertake its regulatory functions. It also allows the Australian community to understand how the regulatory function intends to deliver its objective of ensuring the protection of the environment at leased federal airports.

The information contained within this document does not reduce, extend or modify legislative obligations or powers contained in the legislation. This is an administrative document that assists but does not control regulatory, compliance and enforcement related decisions. Each decision will consider all matters relevant to the circumstances.

In the event of any inconsistency between this document and the legislation under which the department exercises a statutory function, power or discretion, the legislation will prevail.

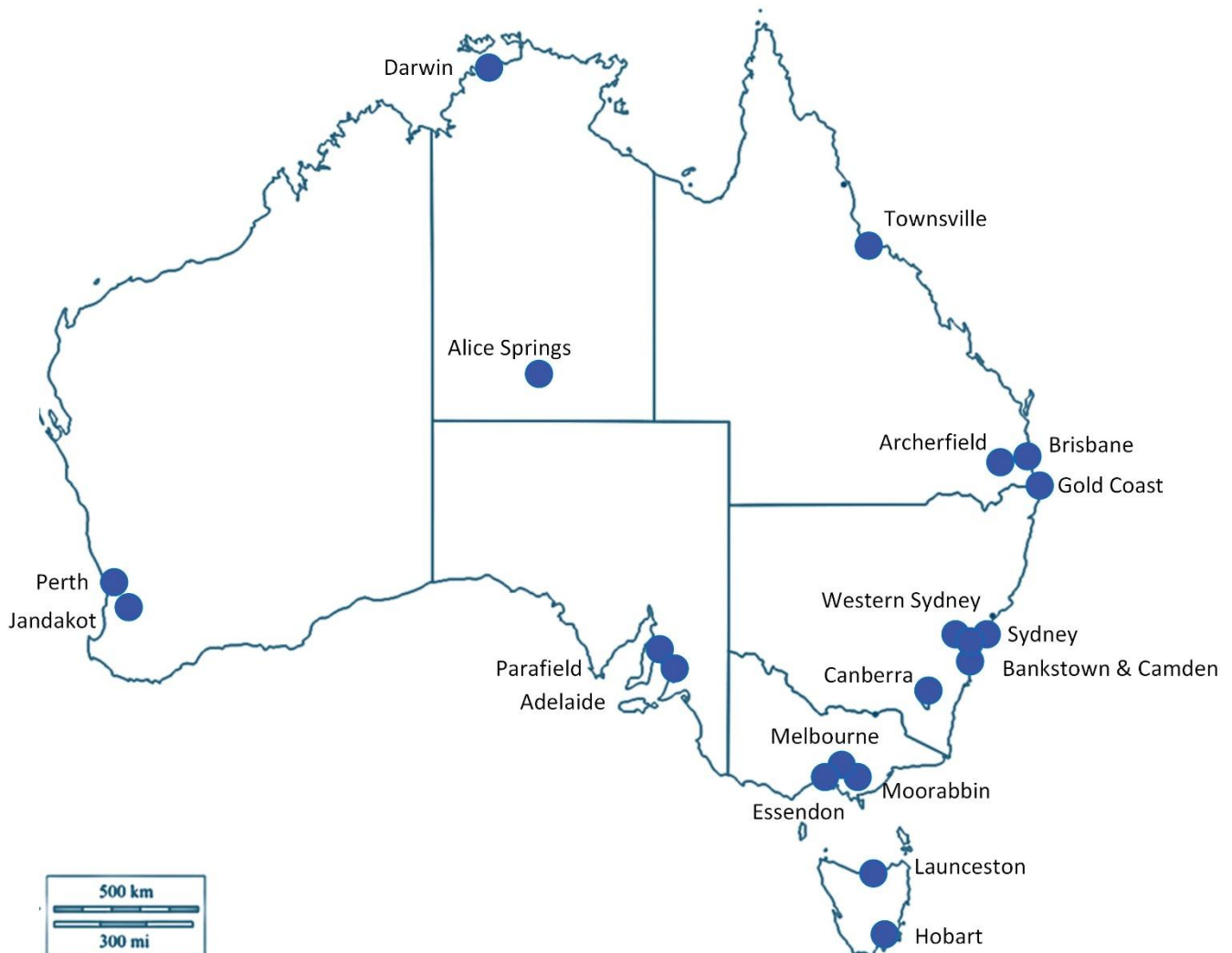


Figure 1: Twenty leased federal airports regulated by Airport Environment Officers under the *Airports Act 1996* and *Airports (Environment Protection) Regulations 2026*.

Introduction

Australian Government regulation underpins economic markets, protects the environment, advances societal protections and benefits all Australians.

As a department we are committed to:

- reducing unnecessary red tape and improving regulatory efficiencies
- delivering better practice regulation – in the pursuit of regulatory outcomes.

This commitment extends to the department's regulation of activities on leased federal airports under the Act and its associated regulations, including those relating to the protection of the environment.

On behalf of the department, a network of authorised officers—AEOs—provide day-to-day regulatory oversight of the environment at 20¹ leased federal airports around Australia (Figure 1) and have specific, independent decision-making powers to ensure regulatory compliance and support best practice environmental management. AEOs monitor compliance of regulated entities in accordance with the Act, the Regulations and a range of relevant standards, codes, and other obligations.

This document seeks to establish clear roles and responsibilities for those operating in the aviation environment, including regulators, regulated entities, and stakeholders. It forms a fundamental part of the Airport Environment Regulation Governance Framework (Figure 2).

This document aims to articulate a clear, concise and practical approach to:

- best practice environmental regulation at leased federal airports
- creating and maintaining trust and confidence, through understanding regulatory roles and responsibilities
- supporting the shared best interests of the aviation environment.

This document also sets out our regulatory practice principles and the way we intend to approach our regulatory responsibilities. These principles will help us advance:

- an outcomes-based approach to regulation
- a risk-based approach to regulation
- the efficient delivery of regulatory services and achievement of regulatory outcomes.

Supporting governance documents

This Practice Statement is supported by additional documents related to the regulatory activities of AEOs. These documents include, but are not limited to:

- the Airport Environment Compliance and Enforcement Policy
- the Airport Environment Regulation Risk Policy
- the Airport Environment Regulatory Engagement Charter
- the Airport Environment Officer Operations Manual
- Specific guidelines and policies
- The Airport Building Control Operations Manual.

¹ Two leased federal airports, Tennant Creek and Mount Isa, are not subject to the land use, environment, planning and building control requirements under the Act and Regulations.

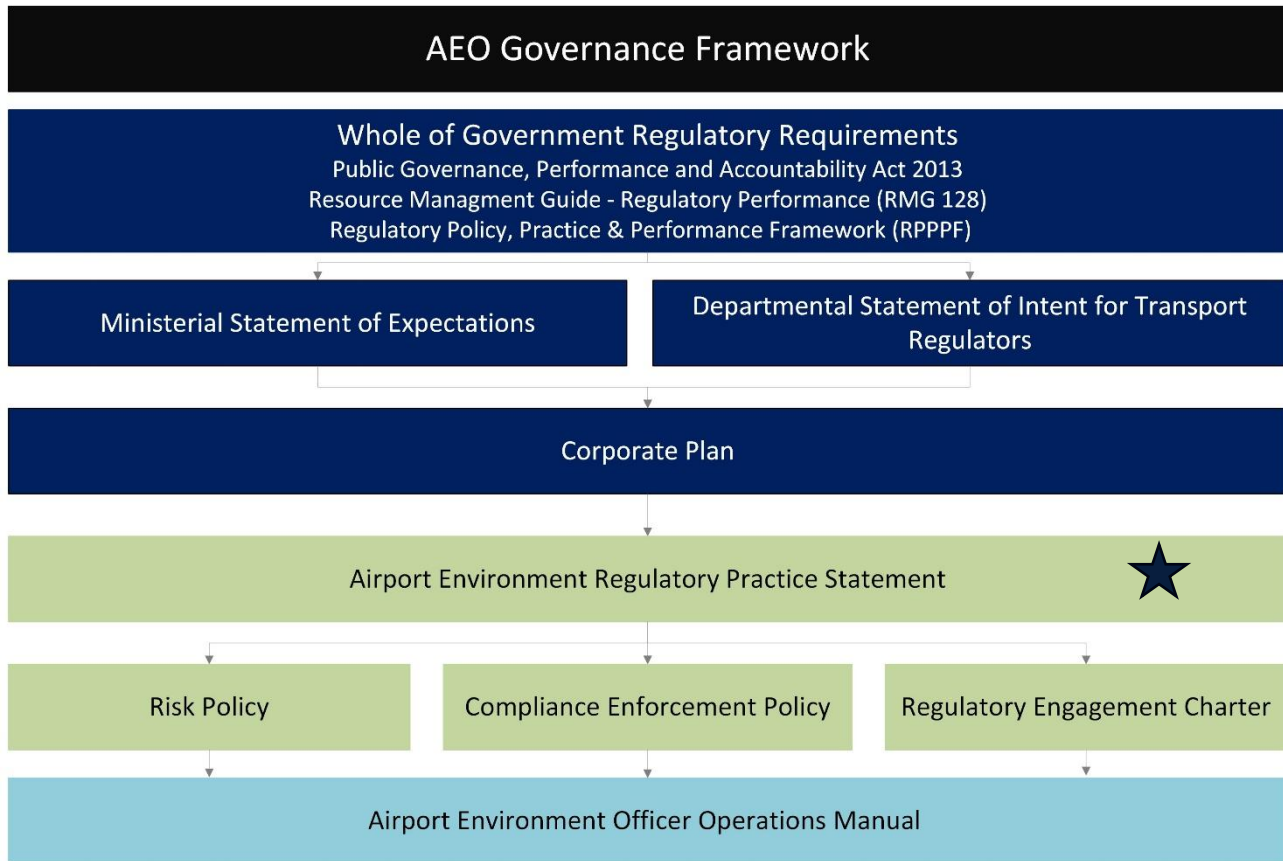


Figure 2: Airport Environment Officer Governance Framework showing where this Regulatory Practice Statement sits within the framework.

Our regulatory model

Our regulatory model sits within a broader government policy and legislative context, and articulates the outcomes we seek to achieve through the regulatory roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders. It includes the strategies we use, how we understand and engage with risk, our regulatory, compliance and enforcement principles, how we work to ensure our regulatory practice meets our objectives, and the expectations of our stakeholders.

Our Outcomes

- Protection of the environment at leased federal airports
- An efficient, sustainable, competitive, safe and secure transport system

Our Strategies

- Engage
- Educate
- Evaluate
- Enforce

Our Regulatory Principles

- User Centred
- Risk-Based
- Data Driven
- Outcomes Focused
- Continuous Improvement

Our Compliance and Enforcement Principles

- Targeted
- Proportionate
- Accountable
- Consistent
- Transparent

Figure 3 below shows how these elements fit together. Each element is explained in further detail in the following sections.

Airport Environment Regulatory Model

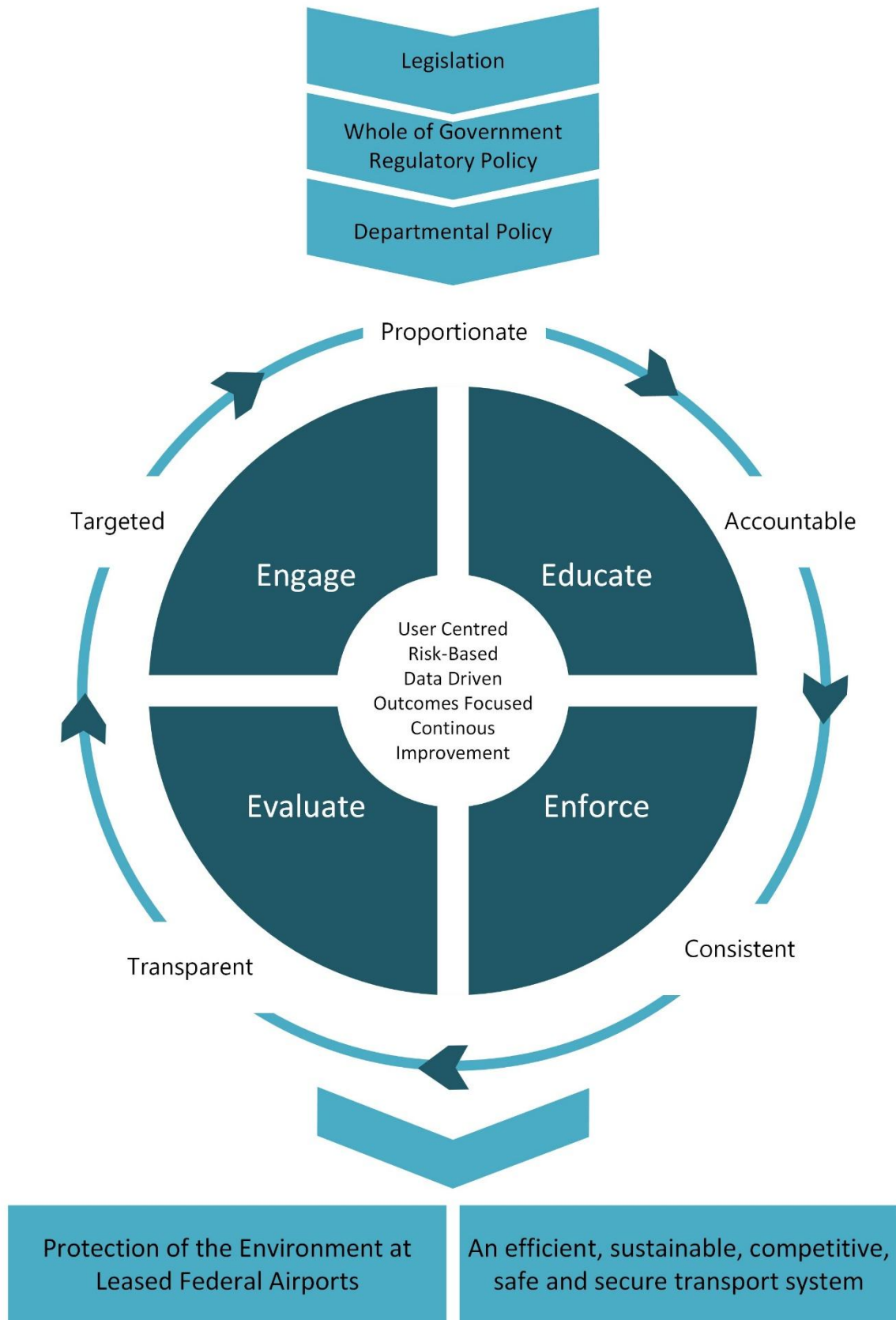


Figure 3: Our regulatory model.

Our regulatory operating context

Our regulatory frameworks and responsibilities

The regulatory function undertaken by AEOs is informed and shaped by various documents that are produced by and for government. These documents combine and interrelate to provide guidance across a range of regulatory responsibilities.

Whole of government

The Australian Government has a whole-of-government framework for regulatory activities. This includes the [Resource Management Guide on Regulator Performance \(RMG 128\)](#)² and regulator performance reporting under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act).

To be consistent with RMG 128, the regulation of the airport environment at leased federal airports should have regard to the principles for best-practice regulation that facilitate a consistent approach to regulation across government.

Principles of regulator best practice

1. **Continuous improvement and building trust** — regulators adopt a whole-of-system perspective, continuously improving their performance, capability and culture to build trust and confidence in Australia's regulatory settings
2. **Risk-based and data driven** — regulators manage risks proportionately and maintain essential safeguards while minimising regulatory burden, and leveraging data and digital technology to support those they regulate to comply and grow
3. **Collaboration and engagement** — regulators are transparent and responsive communicators, implementing regulations in a modern and collaborative way

The Australian Government's Department of Finance [Regulatory Policy, Practice and Performance Framework](#)³ (RPPPF) guides policymakers and regulators to apply six principles for effective regulation: targeted and risk-based, system-integrated, user-centred, evidence-driven, digitally adaptive, and continuous improvement.

The Department of Finance continues to develop tools to support agencies to implement the RPPPF. The RPPPF enables regulators and policymakers to balance compliance with flexibility, allowing businesses to operate efficiently while adhering to necessary regulations.

As Australian Public Service (APS) employees, AEOs must also behave in accordance with the [APS Values](#), and the [APS Code of Conduct](#) under the *Public Service Act 1999*.⁴ As a regulator with legislated enforcement powers and access to a range of penalty provisions, including prosecutions, our prosecution processes must also be consistent with the [Prosecution Policy of the Commonwealth](#).⁵

² (Finance) Department of Finance [Regulator Performance \(RMG 128\)](#) Finance website (2025) accessed 23 September 2026.

³ Finance RPPPF [Australian Public Service Regulatory Reform](#) Finance website, n.d. accessed 23 September 2026.

⁴ APSC (Australian Public Service Commission) [Working with integrity](#) APSC website accessed 23 September 2026.

⁵ CDPP (Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions) [Prosecution Policy of the Commonwealth](#) CDPP website accessed 23 September 2026.

The Department

The department regulates a range of activities including, international aviation, federally leased airports, coastal trading and vehicle safety. Our regulation of the airport environment at leased federal airports operates within this broader departmental setting.

The department regulates and promotes awareness of environmental issues to ensure pollution and other environmental impacts on leased federal airports and surrounding land are appropriately managed.

The Ministerial Statement of Expectations for Transport Regulation (Ministerial Statement) sets out the Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government expectations, on behalf of the Australian Government, of the Secretary and staff of the department, regarding how department regulators carry out their regulatory functions. Among other things, the Statement of Expectations requires the department to 'Ensure Airport Environment Strategies for federally-leased airports comprehensively set out how airports will operate in a manner that maintains or improves environmental health and undertake assessment and monitoring activities to ensure compliance with such standards'⁶. The department responds to the Regulatory Statement of Expectations with the Transport Regulation Statement of Intent (Sol). The Ministerial Statement and the Sol are made available on the department's website⁷

The department's [Corporate Plan](#)⁸ sets out the department's purposes, outcomes and programs, against which it measures its performance. Figure 4 presents the elements of the Corporate Plan relevant to the AEO function and environmental regulation of airports.

Corporate Plan

Purpose

We work with our partners to enable connected, productive, safe, sustainable and culturally vibrant communities in our cities, regions and territories to improve the lives of Australians.

Outcome 2

Transport Connectivity - An efficient, sustainable, competitive, safe and secure transport system for all transport users through regulation, financial assistance and safety investigations.

Program 2.3 Air Transport

Figure 4: Airport environment regulatory function mapped to key elements of the department's Corporate Plan.

The department is committed to a regulatory stewardship approach to ongoing regulatory reform, guided by RMG 128. We work to continuously improve regulatory performance and ensure regulatory settings are fit for purpose and provide safe, secure, and effective regulation of all targeted activities and regulated transport systems. We take a risk-based, collaborative and data-driven approach to administering effective regulation.

It is important that the delivery of the AEO function aligns with departmental values and occurs within this governance framework. This ensures consistency of regulatory tasks and coordination of policy objectives across the department. To meet our obligations under the PGPA Act, the department reports on regulatory performance in its Corporate Plan and the Annual Performance Statement, in line with RMG 128.

⁶ DITRDCA (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts) [ditrdca-transport-regulation-soe-2025.pdf](#) p. 4.

⁷ DITRDCA (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts) [Regulation in the Department](#). Statement of Expectations and Statement of Intent accessed 23 September 2026

⁸ DITRDCA [Corporate Plan](#) 2026/27 pages 8,9,53-57 accessed 23 September 2026.

Legislation

Between 1997 and 2003, the Australian Government sold long-term leases (up to 99 years) for 22 Commonwealth-owned airports to the private sector. The *Airports Act 1996*, which commenced in 1996, established the legislative framework to support 20 of these leased federal airports.⁹ The legislative framework includes the *Airports (Environment Protection) Regulations 2026* (the Regulations).

The Regulations establish a system of regulation for activities at airports that generate, or have the potential to generate, pollution or excessive noise. The Regulations also support the preservation of native habitats and protection of culturally significant and historic sites.

The Regulations were originally made in 1997 with the aim of promoting better environmental outcomes at leased federal airports. They were repealed by the *Airports (Environment Protection) (Repeal and Consequential Amendments) Regulations 2026*, remade and replaced from 1 April 2026 by the *Airports (Environment Protection) Regulations 2026*. Despite the repeal of the old Regulations, under the saving and transitional provisions of the 2026 Regulations, the old Regulations continue to apply until the period ending immediately before 1 April 2027. Therefore, changes under the 2026 Regulations will take effect from 1 April 2027, giving stakeholders 12 months to adapt to the new standards. The old Regulations continue to apply for all purposes during the transition period as if the repeal had not happened.

The 2026 Regulations include a mechanism to enable the Minister to determine investigation levels and amend regulations to respond to emerging pollutants of concern and align our regulations with changing National Standards or with our international treaty obligations.¹⁰ A Ministerial determination would replace the investigation levels, which are currently set out in the Schedules to the Regulations.

The Objects of the Regulations are:

- a) to establish, in conjunction with National Environment Protection Measures made under section 14 of the *National Environment Protection Council Act 1994*, a Commonwealth system of regulation of, and accountability for, activities at airports that generate, or have potential to generate:
 - i. pollution; or
 - ii. offensive noise; and
- b) to promote improving environmental management practices for activities carried out at airport sites.

The Act and the Regulations operate in conjunction with other Commonwealth legislation (e.g. the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*) and state and territory legislation covering matters not otherwise provided for by the Act and the Regulations (e.g. waste management).

The Airport Environment Officer (AEO) function

AEOs are appointed under the Regulations to oversee and monitor the compliance of ALCs and their tenants against their environmental responsibilities at leased federal airports.

Under the Regulations, AEOs have various powers to take regulatory action when non-compliance with the Act or the Regulations is suspected or occurs. Under the Regulations, AEOs have monitoring, investigation and enforcement powers.¹¹ All AEOs are authorised officers for the purposes of Part 18 of the Act¹² which allows them to enter any airport premises and conduct searches (with the consent of the occupier) and to exercise

⁹ Tennant Creek and Mount Isa airports are not subject to the land use, environment, planning and building control requirements under the Act. Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport (WSI) is also recognised under the Act and the Regulations.

¹⁰ See Regulations, s 14.

¹¹ 1997 Regulations, Parts 5 and 6; 2026 Regulations, Parts 6 and 7.

¹² Instrument of Authorisation of Officers with Monitoring and Remedial Powers 2024 (No. 1).

monitoring powers, which include but are not limited to the power to search, inspect, take photographs, and ask questions.¹³

AEOs also monitor ALCs and tenant adherence to various national standards, policies, procedures, plans and strategies as required by airport Head-Lease Agreements, Major Development Plans, and Airport Environment Strategies.

Our main stakeholders

Many different stakeholders contribute to and influence the environmental management and regulation of leased federal airports. The table below summarises the main stakeholders and how they contribute to environmental protection and management at leased federal airports.

Table 1: Our main stakeholders and how they can influence environmental management and regulation at airports.

Stakeholders	Influences
Airport Lessee Companies	Hold the primary responsibility for managing the airport in accordance with the obligations under the Act and associated regulations. They are bound by clauses in Head Lease Agreements entered into with the Australian Government. ALCs are increasingly diversifying their economic base and tend to have multiple and diverse tenancies on the airport site.
Operators of an Undertaking	Any person or company operating a business or carrying out an activity, operation, or process on an airport e.g. sublessees or tenants. Their actions/activities can have an impact on the environment.
Australian Government	Central agencies set whole of government regulatory frameworks. Other agencies provide advice on matters under consideration by the AEO or as part of Major Development Plan or Master Plan processes e.g. in relation to heritage, matters of national environmental significance, specific contaminants and human health.
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts	Regulatory authority administering the Act and associated regulations. The department also establishes the regulatory policy settings under which the AEO function operates and resources the function. AEOs are employees of the department or contractors engaged by the department.
Local and State Governments	Airports may need to work with both local and state government agencies, such as environmental protection agencies. Section 136 of the Act allows relevant State or Territory laws regarding environmental management to continue to operate at leased federal airport sites on Commonwealth land, to the extent the State or Territory laws can operate concurrently with the Act and do not conflict with the airport environmental standards under the Act.
General Public	Individuals or groups who are potentially impacted by airport activities or have an interest in environmental protection more generally. Individuals and groups may lobby the department, Ministers, ALCs or AEOs to address environmental concerns.

The department is committed to being ‘a good neighbour’ and is conscious that leased federal airports, while located on Commonwealth land, are situated alongside communities in state and territory jurisdictions.

¹³ Part 18 of the Act sets out the monitoring powers of authorised officers under the Act.

Regulatory outcomes

Our primary regulatory outcome is to:

ensure the protection of the environment¹⁴ at leased federal airports in accordance with the Objects of the Regulations and national guidelines and frameworks.

We also seek to contribute to:

an efficient, sustainable, competitive, safe and secure transport system for all transport users through regulation, financial assistance and safety investigations¹⁵.

In doing so, our intent is to:

1. Promote awareness of environmental issues and to ensure that management systems are in place to deal with the pollution, noise and other environmental impacts that are generated by and on airports. This is done with a view to reducing those environmental impacts and increasing public amenity over time.
2. Ensure Airport Master Plans and Airport Environment Strategies for leased federal airports comprehensively set out how airports will operate in a manner that maintains or improves environmental health and undertake assessments and monitoring activities to ensure compliance with relevant standards.
3. Administer the Regulations efficiently and effectively by taking a risk-based, collaborative and data-driven approach to reviewing and shaping our regulatory settings.

To ensure regulatory outcomes are met, AEOs monitor a variety of environmental issues in their day-to-day regulatory role (Figure 5).



Figure 5: Typical environmental issues monitored by AEOs.

¹⁴ Noting that the 'environment', is considered broadly, as defined within the leases to 'include, without limitation, the water, groundwater, soil, subsoils, air, biota and habitat and sites of heritage value or of significance to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people on, above or below the airport site and the structures.

¹⁵ DITRDCSA [Corporate Plan](#) 2026/27 page,45 accessed 23 September 2026.

Regulatory roles and responsibilities

In administering the legislation that protects the airport environment, the department and AEOs work together with our main stakeholders, as well as individuals, groups, and organisations. Such entities generally reflect four key regulatory perspectives: regulators, regulated entities, stakeholders, and the wider community. In this part, we consider the first two groups, namely those who are either regulators or regulated entities.

Regulator

The Secretary

The Australian Government is the regulator for leased federal airports.¹⁶ The regulatory functions administered and overseen by the department are delegated to the Secretary by the Minister. The Secretary is an authorised person under the Act and has specific stand-alone functions and powers under the Regulations (e.g. review powers). Certain powers afforded to the Minister and the Secretary can be and are delegated to officers of the department.

Airport Environment Officers (AEOs)

The department gives operational effect and on-ground delivery of the regulatory function through a network of authorised officers, the AEOs. An AEO is appointed by the Secretary and authorised under the Act¹⁷ and the Regulations to exercise powers in relation to monitoring, investigating, and enforcing.

AEOs play a central role in the environmental regulatory regime at leased federal airports and ensure effective monitoring, prevention and reduction of pollution and offensive noise at leased federal airport sites.

An AEO's daily activities support the intent of the legislation, which encourages a cooperative approach to environmental management and continuous environmental improvement for all activities at the airport. This is achieved primarily through provision of advice and supporting the implementation of the Airport Environment Strategy and is aligned with enforcement of the Regulations.

Upon request of an Airport Building Controller (ABC), an AEO should provide timely advice to an ABC about the environmental impacts of proposed building activities. AEOs do not have express statutory functions under the ABC regulatory scheme but may be consulted by ABCs in the exercise of their functions under the *Airports (Building Control) Regulations 2025* (Building Control Regulations).

Airport Building Controllers (ABCs)

The department has appointed ABCs for each leased federal airport. As authorised officers under the Act,¹⁸ the ABCs ensure that activities at leased federal airports meet the appropriate building and engineering standards in accordance with the Building Code of Australia and the Building Control Regulations.

ABCs advise building activity applicants and airport operators on building control matters and provide approvals and certifications required as set out in the legislation. The ABCs also liaise with AEOs on environmental issues relevant to their considerations.

¹⁶ Tennant Creek and Mount Isa airports are not subject to the land use, environment, planning and building control requirements under the Act.

¹⁷ By virtue of an AEO's appointment as an authorised officer under the Instrument of Authorisation of Officers with Monitoring and Remedial Powers 2024 (No. 1).

¹⁸ By virtue of an ABC's appointment as an authorised officer under the Instrument of Authorisation of Officers with Monitoring and Remedial Powers 2024 (No. 1).

Regulated entities

Airport Lessee Company (ALC)

ALCs are private sector entities which entered into long-term lease agreements with the Commonwealth for airports on Commonwealth land.¹⁹ ALCs have primary responsibility for managing the broad duties and obligations as set out in the Act and its associated regulations, related to maintaining, developing and improving the airport precinct. This includes obligations to comply with the standards, processes and limits set out in the Regulations. As such, the ultimate responsibility for ensuring sound environmental management outcomes falls to the ALC and, to a lesser extent, airport tenants and operators of undertakings.

As part of their role, ALCs are responsible for preparing, maintaining and ensuring compliance with airport Master Plans, Major Development Plans, and the Airport Environment Strategy (AES). The AES is the basis through which airports implement environmental performance requirements and guide airport tenants to meet environmental responsibilities. The AES is recognised as a critical component of the leased federal airport's environmental regulatory regime and sits within the airport Master Plan.

The AES comprehensively details the ALC's environment management plan, including how the airport will be operated, and the activities undertaken so that the environmental quality of the airport is maintained or improved for the period covered by the strategy.

Airport Tenants

Sub-lessees (Tenants) and all operators of undertakings on airports have direct obligations under the Regulations. This includes complying with AEO's and ALC's directions, providing reasonable assistance to AEOs and ALCs, reporting activities and complying with the general duties to avoid polluting, preserve habitats and prevent offensive noise.

Tenants may also be required (through the AES) to produce an Environmental Management Plan. The Environmental Management Plan sets out how the operator manages its business to ensure the environment is protected and its obligations under the Regulations are met.

Our approach to regulation

'Achieving good regulatory outcomes is almost always a co-operative effort; by government, amongst regulators, the regulated, and the broader community. Governance arrangements for regulators can be important to foster such co-operative efforts and build the legitimacy of any necessary, strong enforcement action. For these reasons, governance arrangements require careful consideration to ensure they promote, rather than hinder the efficient achievement of policy objectives and public confidence in the operations of the regulatory agencies.'

—The Governance of Regulators (OECD, 2014, p. 15)

The department employs a range of strategies to deliver its vision of being an effective and leading regulatory agency. These include ensuring that we:

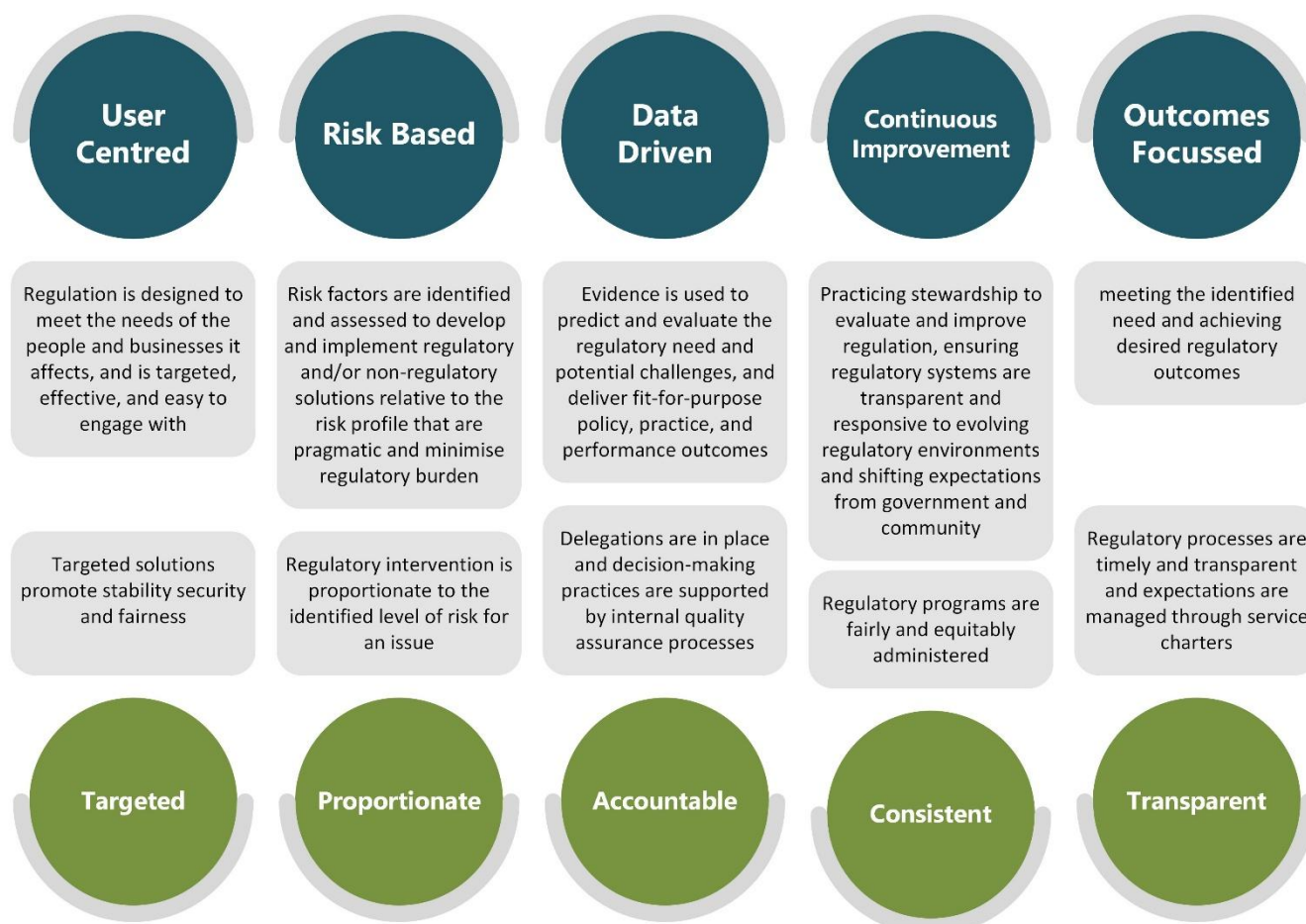
- communicate with regulated entities in a clear, targeted and effective manner
- undertake actions that are proportionate to the risk being managed
- apply compliance and monitoring approaches that are streamlined and coordinated
- are open and transparent wherever possible in our dealings with regulated entities
- actively contribute to the continuous improvement of regulatory frameworks

¹⁹ Between 1997 and 2003, the Australian Government sold long-term leases (up to 99 years) for 22 Commonwealth-owned airports to the private sector.

- support, where appropriate, the efficient operation of regulated entities.

Our principles

Informed by the [Regulatory Policy, Practice & Performance Framework](#)²⁰, the regulatory work of the AEOs is guided by the following principles (Figure 6). These principles guide how we regulate efficiently, design regulations and how we enforce regulations.



Based on the RPPPF framework

Figure 6: Our Regulatory Practice Principles and Compliance and Enforcement Principles

Our regulatory workforce

Effective and efficient delivery of regulatory functions relies upon a professional, informed, skilled, and supported regulatory officer (AEO) workforce who are empowered to make sound, independent, consistent and evidence-based decisions.

The department is committed to supporting its regulatory officers by enabling regular specialist skills refreshment and training and providing standards, guidance and tools to assist with regulatory decision-making that is aligned with best practice environmental regulation. It also aims to provide clear guidance of expectations to regulated entities to assist them in meeting their regulatory obligations.

²⁰ Finance RPPPF [Australian Public Service Regulatory Reform](#) Finance website, n.d. accessed 23 September 2026

The department supports all staff engaged in regulatory activities to understand their operating environment, including in terms of:

- the legislation, policies and plans – and their respective nature and intent
- the industry sector and its stakeholders – and their challenges and drivers
- the national and sub-national context – in which all stakeholders are operating.

How we regulate

As a capable, competent, and credible regulator, at all times we:

- operate within our regulatory remit – by making lawful, considered and timely decisions
- are accountable for, and transparent about, our regulatory activities – and have appropriate governance arrangements in place
- take a balanced and proportionate approach – when responding to non-compliance
- maintain focus – by prioritising and directing our efforts to regulatory outcomes.

By doing so, we align our regulatory efforts with the principles of regulator best practice, allowing us to:

- seek to continuously improve and build trust – by improving our own regulatory capability and performance, and trust and confidence in the entire regulatory system
- be risk-based and data driven – while reducing regulatory burdens, and leveraging digital and technological opportunities
- be committed to collaboration and engagement – by communicating responsively, fostering meaningful engagement with First Nations peoples, stakeholders and communities, and implementing regulation in a modern and collaborative way.

Our **Airport Environment Regulatory Engagement Charter** outlines the behaviours that we will model as regulators and those that we expect of regulated entities.

How we engage, educate, enforce, and evaluate

When it comes to regulatory practice and regulatory delivery, ‘one size does not fit all’. For this reason, we use various strategies and techniques, including those outlined in Table 2.

Table 2: Our regulatory strategies²¹

Strategy	As a Regulator we...
Engage	identify and work with regulated entities about what the regulator is trying to achieve, and how the regulated entity can comply with their regulatory duties and obligations
Educate	provide or make information available to regulated entities about their rights and responsibilities, and how the regulated entity can comply with their regulatory duties and obligations
Enforce	identify regulated entities that are non-compliant and use a range of enforcement options to bring the regulated entity back into compliance with their regulatory duties and obligations
Evaluate	are committed to continuous improvement and monitor, measure, report and review our regulatory performance against our regulatory outcomes

²¹ Table 2 has been adapted from Navigating Regulatory Language: An A to Z Guide (Pink, 2021, p. 99).

How we engage with risk

The department is committed to maintaining effective and efficient regulatory frameworks that are fit for purpose and proportionate to risk. We use a risk-based approach to monitoring and compliance activities with a focus on achieving sound, practical outcomes. As a department, we have a **moderate appetite for regulatory risks, and we have a low tolerance for systemic non-compliance with regulation.**²²

As a regulator, we consider a ‘regulatory risk’ to be something that interferes with or impacts upon our ability to deliver regulatory policy objectives or achieve regulatory outcomes.²³ Understanding and managing regulatory risks is a process which includes identifying, prioritising, and mitigating those risks. For this reason, taking a risk-based regulatory approach allows us to formally consider and respond to the environmental risks posed at airports, and tailor individual airport AEO resourcing and regulatory activities accordingly.

At a high level our regulatory risks include the:

- risks of harm to the environment
- risks posed by regulated entities and other stakeholders
- risks arising from changes in the regulatory operating and receiving environments.

In the context of environmental regulation of leased federal airports, risks centre around activities that generate or have the potential to generate pollution or offensive noise. At more of a functional level our regulatory risks include:

- specific existing or ongoing risks to the airport environment – for example air, water and soil pollution or heritage management practices
- emerging or transitional risks – for example those posed by building development activity or newly identified contaminants of concern.

Monitoring compliance and having transparent processes and documentation to inform regulated entities of their obligations are fundamental to managing our risks and ensuring we are an effective regulator. The **Airport Environment Regulation Risk Policy** outlines our approach to assessing and responding to risks and draws upon the department’s risk management guidelines and policies. The **Airport Environment Officer Operations Manual** articulates how a risk-based approach is applied in the environmental regulation of leased federal airports.

Compliance monitoring and regulatory responses

The department aims to support a cooperative approach to environmental management and encourages continuous environmental improvement for all activities at the leased federal airports.

Our **Airport Environment Compliance and Enforcement Policy** outlines our approach to responding to and managing instances of non-compliance.

The **Airport Environment Officer Operations Manual** sets out how we implement our approach to compliance and enforcement under the Regulations at leased federal airports.

²² Corporate Plan 2025-26 (Department of Infrastructure, p. 39).

²³ Navigating Regulatory Language: An A to Z Guide (Pink, 2021, p. 240).

Our approach to complaints and dispute resolution

Despite best efforts and intended adherence to the **Airport Environment Regulatory Engagement Charter**, disputes and complaints may arise from time to time.

For the purposes of this Practice Statement, we make the distinction between complaints:

- of a general nature – which typically relate to dissatisfaction of a ‘client’ or ‘customer’ around services they expected to receive, or the attitude and behaviour of staff they interacted with; and
- relating to regulatory functions – which typically relate to dissatisfaction of a ‘regulated entity’ (who has associated regulatory duties and obligations) around the regulator exercising regulatory powers, making regulatory decisions, use of regulatory discretion, and/or recommending, selecting, or applying of regulatory intervention. The Act and Regulations provide for reconsideration and review of certain decisions.

The [Department’s Client Service Charter](#) should be referred to for disputes and complaints of a general nature.

The **Airport Environment Officer Operations Manual** sets out the principles, roles and responsibilities and process for handling reviews relating to our AEO regulatory function.

Evaluation and continuous improvement

As a department, we are committed to the improvement of environmental management practices for activities carried out at leased federal airports, and we understand the importance of having clear oversight of the processes and performance of our regulators. The governance arrangements and supporting documentation outlined in this Practice Statement will be reviewed regularly (or when significant changes occur) and will be further informed by regular AEO reporting to the department. Evaluation also includes seeking and considering regular feedback from regulated entities (ALCs and their tenants) as well as other stakeholders.

Our evaluation and continuous improvement approach will ensure our AEOs are supported by a best practice governance framework when undertaking their regulatory role and assist regulated entities in understanding the regulatory approach applied to the environmental regulation of leased federal airports.