

The Royal Australian Navy is committed to be a leader in managing the environment sustainably to support the ADF's ability to defend Australia and its national interests.

The Royal Australian Navy's restrictions on the use of sonars are included in Environmental Procedure Cards (EPCs). These cards form part of the Australian Defence Force Maritime Activities Environmental Management Plan.

The procedures address possible risks to whales and other sea animals, focusing on times and places where risks are likely to be highest. For example, special mitigation measures are required during whale migration along the east and west coasts, in whale concentration sites such as the southern Great Barrier Reef and the edge of the continental shelf.

Ships are required to maintain an acoustic and/or visual watch to help ensure animals are not adversely affected by the use of sonars. Transmissions cease where an animal is too close.

EPCs were first introduced in 2006 and are reviewed when there is a change in type of sonar, law or policy, or our understanding of risks to the environment.

The procedures included in the EPCs have been reviewed by the Department of the Environment, as the national regulatory authority, and relevant interest groups.

Navy routinely seeks advice from Defence Science and Technology Group scientists on likely impacts on the environment and, where necessary, engages contractors with specialist skills.

The publishing, in 2016, of the latest EPC for the new air warfare destroyers sonars is an example of this process.

Navy is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of all EPC and associated planning guides to ensure they remain effective in managing environmental risks.