



# Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) framework

## Introduction and Purpose of the Framework

The Australian Government is committed to demonstrating and accounting for identified outcomes and improvements from its natural resource management (NRM) investments. Monitoring and reporting on progress and improvement is an essential element of effective program management.

The purpose of this Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) framework is to outline the MERI approach for NRM projects. This MERI Framework has been developed to ensure:

- Regional delivery partners understand their reporting obligations and establish effective systems to capture and report the required information on project progress and achievements;
- the Australian Government can track and report on the program's progress in delivering funding, activities, outcomes and expenditure;
- information collected in the administration of the program is used effectively by funding recipients and the Australian Government, to inform the review and future design and delivery of projects and programs; and
- there is accountability from Regional delivery partners and the Australian Government for public expenditure.

This framework is based on the [Australian Government's Natural Resource Management Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement Framework](#).

## MERI approach for Natural Resource Management programs

The MERI framework will support the evaluation of progress towards achieving the outcomes of NRM programs.

The MERI approach will support the key principles of the framework by:

- Assessing the performance of NRM interventions by implementing monitoring that encompasses a range of temporal and spatial scales;
- Incorporating multiple lines of quantitative and qualitative evidence about the state (i.e. condition) and trend of identified NRM assets and the impact of program investment to effectively describe what the program has achieved and how the achievements were accomplished;
- Establishing and fostering constructive partnership among state and territory governments, Regional delivery partners and research institutions in the design and implementation of monitoring;
- Delivering meaningful evaluations that are recognised by stakeholders as being well informed, relevant, timely, and are clearly and concisely presented; and

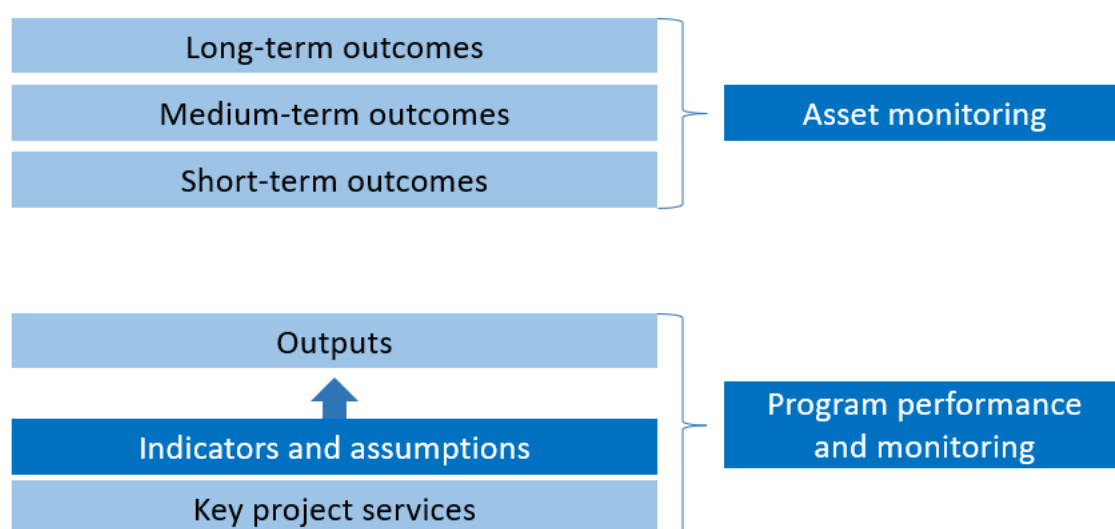
- Establishing effective evaluation methods and feedback loops from evaluation to policy makers and operational staff to inform program changes and improvements.

The methods to meet these principles are set out under each of the MERI headings below.

## Monitoring

Program monitoring will be informed by the evaluation plan and rely on multiple lines of evidence. Monitoring will be carried out at the two levels specified in the [Australian Government’s Natural Resource Management Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement Framework](#): asset monitoring and program performance monitoring. These are required over a range of spatial and temporal scales to achieve this, as shown in Figure 1.

Asset monitoring refers to a process of continually assessing the state of, and change over time, in NRM assets.



**Figure 1: Proposed levels of asset monitoring**

### Short – medium term outcomes monitoring:

Regional delivery partners will be contracted to monitor the impacts of their interventions over the life of the project. Regional Delivery partners must select from the suite of monitoring tools being developed by the Terrestrial Ecosystem Research Network (TERN), and associated requirements for the data to be captured in the [Biodiversity Data Repository](#), unless otherwise agreed by the department. Baseline and ongoing monitoring data will be required to support program evaluations. Regional delivery partners will be required to provide an analysis of what this monitoring is showing at the mid-term and end of project outcome reports.

### Monitoring, Evaluation and Research (MER) networks

Targeted monitoring to answer a specific NRM question may be carried out on a selection of projects. Efforts will be made to get national coverage for targeted monitoring, similar to the [Monitoring, Evaluation and Research \(MER\) pilot project](#) conducted during the Regional Land Partnerships Program. The approach and delivery of this component of monitoring will be developed in conjunction with other projects. Regional delivery partners who choose to join a future MER network will be required to deliver targeted monitoring specific to the NRM topic being addressed. Regional delivery partners will be able to

participate in the additional targeted monitoring voluntarily and with full cost recovery for monitoring expenses.

### Outputs and Activity Monitoring

This level of program performance monitoring will be informed by project reporting and the data specified in the evaluation plan. Progress of projects and the program in meeting targets for undertaking activities and delivering outputs will be monitored along with the administration of the program by the Department.

### Evaluation

Evaluation will provide transparency and accountability while assessing program performance and establishing how well the program is delivering against key performance indicators and program outcomes. The evaluation will include an exploration of what is and is not working well and identify improvements to program structure, processes and delivery approaches for adoption during and at the end of the program, and in future program design.

#### Evaluation principles

The [Australian Government’s Natural Resource Management Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement Framework](#) describes MERI as ‘a continuous cycle of participation and communication rather than a single evaluation and event. MERI promotes learning and adaptive management in response to progressive monitoring and evaluation which enables improvement in program design and achievement of desired outcomes’. This adaptive management cycle is shown in Figure 2.

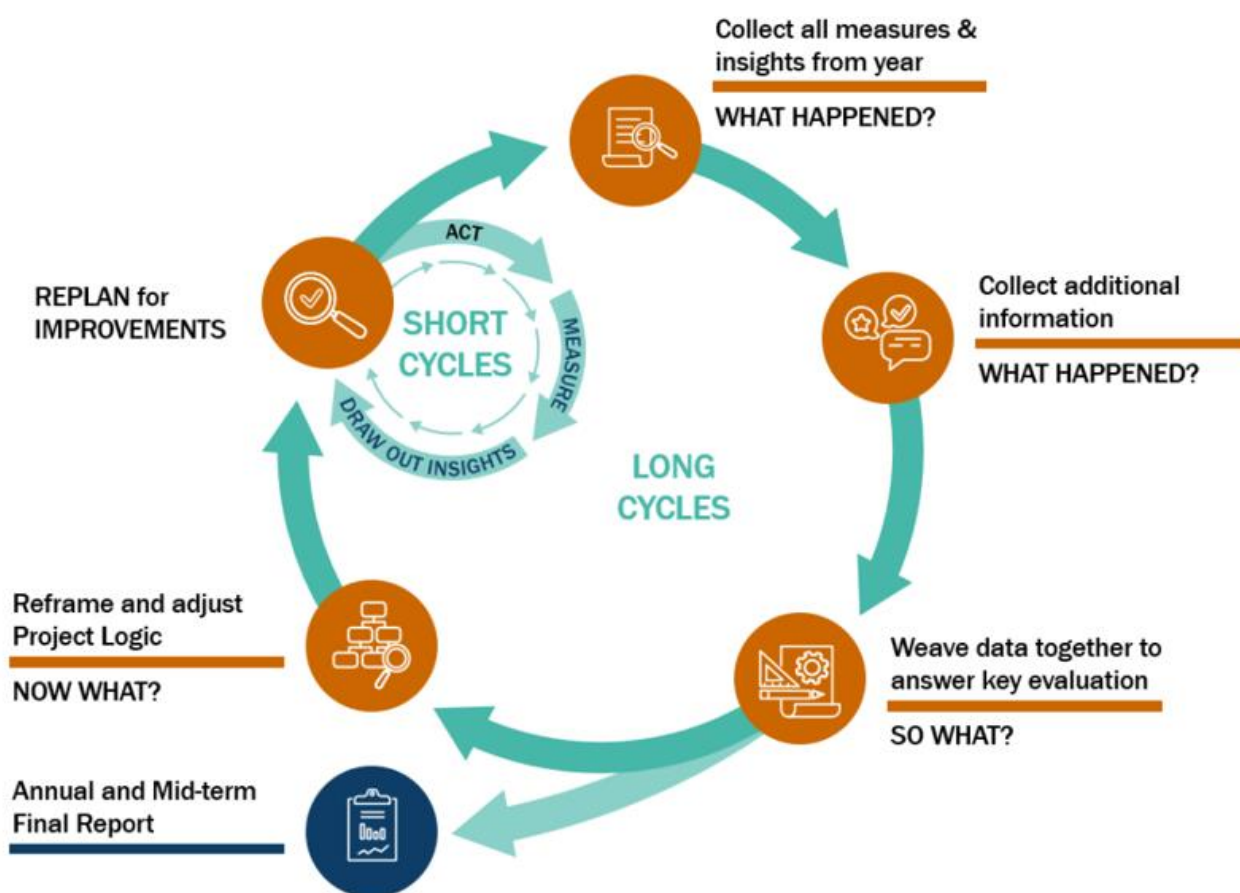


Figure 2: Conceptual diagram of the MERI adaptive management cycle (Clear Horizons, 2022)

This adaptive management cycle will be used to address the following evaluation principles:

- ‘integrated’ into the design of the program;
- ‘fit-for-purpose’ proportional to the program;
- ‘timely’ to support and inform decision making processes;
- ‘evidence-based’ using best available data;
- ‘independent’ at an appropriate degree;
- ‘transparent’ and widely communicated; and
- ‘outcomes-focussed’ on the difference the program is making.

### ***Program Logic***

Consistent with the [Australian Government’s Natural Resource Management Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement Framework](#), a program should use a theory of change program logic hierarchy approach to describe how the program will improve Australia’s natural environment and natural resources. Program logics and sub logics show the links between services delivered (outputs) and identified program outcomes.

### ***Evaluation products***

An evaluation will be informed by Regional Delivery partners’ project monitoring and reporting, and may include the following products:

**Annual (financial year) progress reports:** A simple, easy to understand annual progress report produced by the Department at the end of each financial year. The annual progress report would utilise key performance indicators to measure and report on progress towards the achievement of intermediate and program level outcomes and provide a basic evaluation of progress towards outcomes. The information in the annual progress reports would be collated from Regional delivery partner reports in the Department’s Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement Tool (MERIT).

**Comprehensive mid-term performance evaluation:** A comprehensive program evaluation will take place at a mid-point of the program. For this evaluation, the Department will aggregate Regional delivery partners’ information to make findings about program progress which will be used to implement program improvements and inform future program design. The evaluation will include evaluation of processes, and progress towards (and projected achievement of) outcomes.

**End-of-program performance evaluation:** The Department will conduct an end-of-program evaluation. This evaluation will revisit the mid-term performance evaluations and incorporate new information to provide a closing evaluation of overall program performance of processes, achievement of outcomes and economics. The findings will be used to inform future program delivery and will be informed by delivery partner reporting, targeted and long-term monitoring.

## **Reporting**

### ***Regional delivery partner reporting***

Under a procurement approach, Regional delivery partners will be required to report to the Department to demonstrate that a milestone had been completed before a payment can be made. This reporting

would focus on the delivery of the service, and not on the impact of that action. Reporting requirements include progress reporting, containing, as a minimum:

- i. Outputs delivered;
- ii. Spatial reporting and photographs of intervention locations;
- iii. Confirmation that the project is being conducted as defined in the MERI Plan;
- iv. Reporting of any notifiable work health and safety incidents;
- v. For one of the progress reports – Project progress highlighting key achievement and/or issues;
- vi. For one of the progress reports – any proposed adaptive management actions; and

Mid and end-of project outcomes reporting against the Project's short and medium-term outcomes will be required as set out in the MERI Plan. Reports will need to summarise the state of change detected between the baseline established by the Delivery partner at the commencement of the Project and follow up monitoring. For Projects under three years only short-term outcomes are required.

Regional delivery partners will be required to report through the MERIT online reporting tool. Specific timing and details of reporting will be specified through contracts. Reporting will inform program [evaluations](#) and Departmental reporting.

### ***Departmental reporting***

To ensure transparency, the Department will deliver the summaries of the reports shown under the [evaluation](#) heading. These reports will be informed by data gathered under the [monitoring](#) plan.

### **Improvement**

The Department are committed to promoting a learning culture in the delivery of NRM programs. All components of the program will include a capacity to review, learn and adapt. By adopting a continuous improvement, adaptive management approach, Regional delivery partners and program managers will better understand what is working well, what is not, and how the program can be improved. This will lead to greater effectiveness and efficiency, and ultimately, better delivery of project and program outcomes.

Program level evaluations will be designed to provide findings that drive program improvement for implementation during the program and to inform future program design. Recommendations for improvements will be made at multiple scales and for different components of the program, depending on the focus of the evaluation.

### **Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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