



Photos from left to right: offshore wind farm (shutterstock), Buller's Albatross by Jasmine Zeleny, Australian fur seal pups by Roger Kirkwood, Far Eastern Curlew by Jasmine Zeleny

Alignment between the Renewables Environmental Research Initiative (RERI) and the National Environmental Science Program (NESP)

Supporting Australia's transition to offshore renewable wind energy through scientific research and regulatory guidance, while protecting marine biodiversity.

This factsheet outlines how the RERI and the NESP Marine and Coastal Hub align. Both are funded by, and are initiatives of, the Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW). The RERI takes a targeted approach, supporting regulators and industry with research to reduce environmental uncertainties for renewable energy projects. NESP has a broader scope, using applied science to support governments, communities, and researchers in sustainable marine and coastal management. Together, they strengthen Australia's ability to balance renewable energy development with marine and coastal ecosystem stewardship.

What is RERI?

The RERI supports the renewable energy transition by reducing environmental uncertainty under the EPBC Act for regulators and industry through new regulatory guidance.

Key functions:

- Fills knowledge gaps for priority terrestrial and marine species (e.g., flight heights, migration timing, distribution)
- Produces survey, monitoring, and mitigation guidance for a regulatory context
- Provides publicly available environmental data.

Status:

- 40+ projects, totalling A\$40+ million.
- Covers 200+ EPBC-listed species, including migratory birds, whales, seals and sharks.
- Most contracts for completion in mid-2026, with most outcomes published by late 2026.

What is NESP?

NESP applies research to support the sustainable management of estuaries, reefs, deep waters, and marine and coastal ecosystems.

Key functions:

- Provides baseline biodiversity information for efficient monitoring and management
- Develops environmental monitoring systems
- Produces decision-support tools for protected places like Ramsar sites.

Status:

- Current phase: 2020–21 to 2026–27, with around A\$149 million funding
- 20+ projects on species of importance including seabirds & migratory shorebirds, marine predators (sharks, sealions) and indigenous-led whale & dolphin research.

How RERI and NESP work together

While different in scale and focus, RERI and NESP are complementary, not duplicative.

- NESP provides the foundational science on ecosystems and populations.
- RERI translates this into practical regulatory guidance for offshore renewables.
- Together, they improve environmental outcomes while streamlining offshore wind assessments and approvals.

Similarities:

- Applied science to inform regulation and policy.
- Focus on environmental impacts and marine biodiversity.
- Government-funded through DCCEEW.
- Publicly accessible outputs

Key differences:

Area	RERI	NESP
Primary role	Apply science to offshore renewable energy EPBC assessment processes	Produce foundational environmental science and national datasets
Scope	Narrow: offshore renewables and EPBC-regulated impacts	Broad: marine and coastal ecosystems, species, environment and climate
Timeframe	Mostly short-term (2024–2026)	Long-term, multi-phase (2015–2027+)
Research breadth	Primarily environmental impacts of renewable energy developments	Encompasses climate adaptation, threatened species, and ecosystem services
Industry specificity	Exclusive focus on renewables for regulatory community	Broader scope across all sectors impacting the environment

Benefits for proponents

- **Robust science:** use of NESP and RERI outputs strengthens project planning.
- **Regulatory clarity:** RERI defines accepted survey standards and reporting methods.
- **Avoid duplication:** access to shared outputs.
- **Faster assessments:** new data minimises need for regulators to request further information.
- **Social acceptance:** science-based assessments help build trust in the sector.

Complementary themes

Species ecology: NESP provides models of distribution and movement for whales, seabirds, sharks, pinnipeds. RERI builds on this through applied risk assessments for potential environmental impacts from offshore wind.

Cumulative impacts framework: NESP provides frameworks to assess pressures across sectors. RERI provides a regional approach to filling information gaps.

Data standards: NESP provides data, best practices, models, and search tools. RERI provides regulatory guidance on data expectations for proponents.

Future alignment

- **RERI benefits from NESP:** Leverages existing science and ensures regulatory guidance is grounded in peer-reviewed research.
- **NESP benefits from RERI:** Gains insights into practical regulatory gaps, shaping future marine science priorities.
- **Together,** they create a coherent body of knowledge that supports renewable energy development while protecting biodiversity.

Contact

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Learn more

- www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/epbc/advice/renewable-energy-projects/reri
- www.nespmarinecoastal.edu.au/topic/offshore-wind-energy/