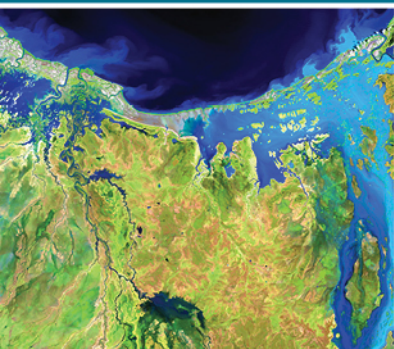




Australian Government
Geoscience Australia



Disability Action Plan

2016-19

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Disability Champion's Foreword



I am pleased to introduce Geoscience Australia's Disability Action Plan. We are committed to supporting people with a disability and providing a workplace that values the diversity of all of its employees.

Approximately one in five Australians has a disability. Improving the representation of people with disability in the workforce will enable us to respond more capably to the needs of the community. By representing the Australian population's diversity, we are better placed to communicate, understand and meet their full range of needs.

This plan aims to improve the representation of people with a disability and increase awareness of the needs of employees with a disability. Actions include making workplace adjustments and changes to recruitment practices to allow skilled and talented job seekers with disability to compete on a level playing field. I encourage all employees, particularly supervisors, to consider your current work and recruitment practices to increase the representation of and support for employees with disability.

The development of this Disability Action Plan demonstrates our intention to prevent discrimination and take a proactive approach to inclusion. It is our goal to support all employees through our flexible workplace practices and our commitment to continually improving the accessibility of our workplace, systems and processes.

This plan forms part of our Inclusive Culture Program, which articulates our commitment to an inclusive workplace culture that provides everyone with the opportunity to contribute, participate and progress.

I look forward to working with you to successfully implement this Action Plan.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart Minchin', written in a cursive style.

Dr Stuart Minchin
Chief of Division
Environmental Geoscience Division

1 Introduction

Geoscience Australia's workforce is characterised by a diverse range of skills, backgrounds and experiences. Disability is one of the five focus areas of our Inclusive Culture Program, together with gender, Indigenous Australians, age and multicultural diversity. The purpose of this Action Plan is to identify and address barriers which prevent people with disability from joining the workforce and to provide a flexible, accessible and inclusive work environment to enable people with disability, injury or illness to fully participate in the workplace. In order to achieve this, we will take action to build a respectful, inclusive and equitable culture and a flexible and supportive work environment which will benefit all employees.

1.1 Program Owner

The Chief Finance and Human Resources Officer is responsible for the oversight of the *Disability Action Plan 2016-2019*, with functional areas being responsible for implementing each action as set out herein.

1.2 Legal and social responsibility

The rights of people with a disability to equal access to employment, training opportunities, fair remuneration, and safe and fair working conditions are protected internationally. Within Australia, the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* makes discrimination on the basis of a disability unlawful in all aspects of society, including employment.

Disability is also a protected attribute under the *Fair Work Act 2009*, for which employers must not take adverse action. Disability is expressly mentioned in the National Employment Standards as one of several eligibility factors underpinning an employee's right to request flexible working arrangements.

Employment at Geoscience Australia is governed by the *Public Service Act 1999* and the Australian Public Service (APS) Values. This plan incorporates our commitment to implement the core recommendations of the [APS Disability Employment Strategy 2016-2019](#).

This Action Plan also works to promote and reinforce our workplace values, in particular:

- *respectful* (valuing everyone by showing respect, support, encouragement and inclusiveness); and
- *ethical* (demonstrating leadership, acting with integrity, trust and ethical intent).

2 Drivers for change

There is a range of evidence to suggest that organisations which value and promote diversity have higher levels of productivity, staff engagement and retention.

In addition to the requirement to comply with all relevant legislation, we recognise that the business case for diversity and inclusion is well established. By reflecting the diversity of the community, we are better placed to represent their needs. The actions in this plan will help us meet our moral and social obligations as a public sector employer, and also help to leverage the known benefits of a diverse workforce to deliver outcomes of the highest quality to our stakeholders.

As at 30 June 2016, we have eight employees who have formally indicated that they have a disability (1.33 percent of our workforce). The corresponding percentage for the APS workforce is 3.3 percent. This suggests that we have a significant opportunity to improve the representation of people with disability through improved attraction and retention methods. This action plan aims to achieve an increase in representation to 3.5 percent of the workforce by 2019. As outlined below, low representation may in part be a result of under reporting. This plan also aims to create a more supportive environment, where employees feel confident to disclose their disability.

2.1 Increased pool of skilled and highly capable people

An estimated 4.2 million Australians (18.5 percent of the population) are living with disability¹, and according to the Australian Network on Disability, approximately 1.58 million of these are of working age and able to work. Organisations that do not recruit from this sector are missing out on candidates with a range of highly valuable skills, and this represents an underutilised talent pool which may prove critical to overcoming skills shortages in a tight labour market now and into the future.

We will apply the [RecruitAbility Scheme](#) to all vacancies to increase the opportunity for applicants with disability to be engaged into the workforce. The scheme aims to attract and develop applicants with disability and also facilitate cultural change in selection panels and agency recruitment.

2.2 Supports ageing workforce

The median age of our workforce is 44, and 46 percent of the workforce is aged 45 or older². The prevalence of disability increases with age, so effective management practices relating to people with disability will ensure we can retain our valued employees and better facilitate their transition to retirement in the most effective way. This serves both to support our highly engaged employees to continue to fulfil their career aspirations, and also allows us to facilitate the transfer of skills and knowledge prior to retirement.

2.3 Enables high-performing, innovative and agile teams

A workforce that includes people with disability, underpinned by a culture of respect and inclusion, supports innovative thinking and collaboration. Employees with diverse backgrounds and experiences

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012). *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings 2012*
<http://www.abs.gov.au/>

² As at 30 June 2016

have different ways of thinking, which allows teams to draw on a range of perspectives and ideas. This prevents “group-think”, improves agility and adaptability to changing priorities, and promotes the delivery of high quality outcomes.

2.4 Increases the diversity of decision making and leadership

By increasing the diversity of the workforce, including improved representation of employees with disability, we improve the diversity of ideas. Decision making is enriched by a diversity of perspectives and ideas. Just as our workforce as a whole should better reflect the community, in turn our leaders should reflect the diversity of the workforce.

3 Definition and disclosure of disability

3.1 What is a disability?

Disability can arise in many ways, and some people may have more than one disability. A disability may be visible or hidden (over 90 percent are hidden). It may be permanent or temporary and may have minimal or substantial impact on a person's abilities. A disability may affect mobility, ability to learn, or ability to communicate easily.

Two definitions of disability are recognised and incorporated into this Action Plan. Both definitions include mental health, and the definitions also clearly acknowledge a range of conditions which are unlikely to be perceptible to others.

1. The Australian Bureau of Statistics' *Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings 2003*, in which 'a person has a disability if they report that they have a limitation, restriction or impairment, which has lasted, or is likely to last, for at least 6 months and restricts everyday activities.'
2. The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* defines disability as:
 - a. total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions
 - b. total or partial loss of a part of the body
 - c. the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness
 - d. the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness
 - e. the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body
 - f. a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction
 - g. a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgement or that results in disturbed behaviourand includes a disability that:
 - h. presently exists
 - i. previously existed but no longer exists
 - j. may exist in the future (including because of a genetic predisposition to that disability)
 - k. is imputed to a person.³

The definition is objective, not subjective, and people with a disability may not personally recognise that their particular condition is a disability, especially where it does not affect their ability to do things.

To avoid doubt, a disability that is otherwise covered by this definition includes behaviour that is a symptom or manifestation of the disability.

3.2 Disclosure of a disability

De-identified data on disability is of value in guiding the development of diversity initiatives that best meet the needs of employees impacted by disability. Such data also provides a benchmark allowing

³ Adapted from the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*

for the effectiveness of activities to be measured over time, enabling informed decision making on allocation of resources for activities which provide the greatest return on investment.

Data from the 2015 APS Employee Census reinforces the need for activities that build a 'safe' culture in which employees can openly identify their disability without fear of negative repercussions. Of those who participated in the survey, 4.7 percent indicated they had a disability. Communication should encourage the understanding that while providing diversity data to an employer is voluntary, accurate workforce diversity data is valuable to guide the development of initiatives that are most appropriate to meet employees' needs. Activities to overcome any negative stereotypes and attitudes attached to disability form a key focus of this Action Plan.

The following issues regarding the collection of diversity data on employees with disability should be noted:

- The provision of disability information, like all diversity information, is voluntary and for a range of reasons individuals may opt not to declare the presence of a disability. There is no legal obligation for an employee to disclose information about their disability.
- The definition of 'disability' varies across data collection methods and some conditions may be included under one definition but not under another.
- The disability may be related to a condition which is not permanent or chronic, therefore it may have emerged since the employee last provided this data or the condition may have been resolved and the disability no longer present since the data was collected.
- The extent and impact of a disability varies widely, so the available data does not capture those employees who may have elected not to have their disability status recorded by the employer on the basis that the employee considers it to have no, or negligible, impact on their work.

4 Strategic Framework

This Action Plan is one component of our broader commitment to diversity through the Inclusive Culture Program (our workplace diversity program). Under Section 18 of the *Public Service Act 1999*, all Australian Government entities are required to establish a workplace diversity program to assist in giving effect to the APS Employment Principles of diversity and discrimination-free workplaces.

Figure 1 below illustrates the strategic linkages between this Action Plan, the *Inclusive Culture Program* and our organisational strategic plans.



Figure 1 Strategic links between Geoscience Australia's Strategic Plan and the Disability Action Plan 2016-2019

5 Objectives

5.1 Increase the representation of employees with disability

The Australian Human Rights Commission states that bias, inaccessibility and exclusion are recurring issues that limit employment opportunities and adversely affect the career aspirations of people with disability. There has been a significantly lower labour force participation rate for people with disability compared with people without disability, and the rate has improved little over the past two decades⁴. Geoscience Australia will continue to ensure its recruitment processes comply fully with anti-discrimination legislation by ensuring there is no direct or indirect discrimination in recruitment processes. This involves clearly defining the inherent requirements of roles and providing reasonable adjustments during the selection process, in order to apply the principles of merit. This will ensure that people with disability have equal opportunities to demonstrate the skills, experience and abilities they can bring to a role. The 'RecruitAbility' Scheme will apply to all roles advertised, to attract and develop applicants with disability and also facilitate cultural changes in selection panels.

This Action Plan aims to increase the representation of employees with disability to at least 3.5 percent of the total workforce by 30 June 2019.

5.2 Retain and provide opportunities for employees with disability

Invest in developing the capability of employees with disability, remove the barriers to progression and support our employees with disability to achieve their career ambitions

A proactive approach to removing the barriers that may stand in the way of our employees' reaching their full potential is important to achieve genuine equality and inclusion. This encompasses our premises (physical accessibility), our systems and technology, as well as any other aspects of the work environment that impose a restriction for people with disability, resulting in limitations on their workforce participation, career progression or job engagement. Our employees have the right to feel confident that their individual needs will be met, and this will be achieved by having efficient processes for identifying and eliminating barriers. Where it is not possible to eliminate a barrier, we will explore adjustments to minimise the impact of those barriers.

⁴ Australian Human Rights Commission (2016). *Willing to Work: National Inquiry into Employment Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability*. <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/publications/willing-work-national-inquiry-employment-discrimination>

5.3 Create an inclusive workplace culture

Build and nurture an inclusive workplace culture in which people with disability are respected and valued

One of the most common barriers to the full participation of people with disability in the workforce is the attitudes and assumptions of others (both overt and concealed), so a key focus of this plan is to develop “disability confidence” of our supervisors and employees. This means supporting our employees and supervisors to understand and recognise the value of the skills and abilities that employees with disability bring to our teams, and challenging the attitudes and biases that prevent people with disability participating fully in our workforce.

As there is no legal requirement for an employee to disclose information about their disability, we aim to create an environment where individuals are comfortable to share this information confidentially with their supervisor, or within the human resources system. This disclosure, coupled with the confidence of supervisors to handle this information appropriately, will allow us to better meet the needs of employees with disability. Willingness to disclose this information will be influenced through general education and raising the awareness of employees, as well as promoting confidence in the policies that protect against adverse responses to disclosure of a disability.

5.4 Explore community partnerships

Connect with other organisations to collaborate, learn and contribute to improved outcomes for people with disability

A comprehensive network of experts exists to provide guidance, resources and information for employers on meeting the needs of people with disability, and to provide support and advocacy services to promote the inclusion of people with disability in the workforce. By exploring opportunities for membership, networking and partnership, we will have access to the support required to ensure the success of this strategy. We will also have the opportunity to collaborate with like-minded organisations on disability inclusion and promote Geoscience Australia as an employer of choice for people with disability.

6 Action Plan

Attraction and Recruitment				
	Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Outcome / Measurement
1	<p>Apply the RecruitAbility scheme (see Appendix A) to all vacancies.</p> <p>a. Develop information guide and instructional material (adapted from APSC material) for hiring managers and panel members</p> <p>b. Update standard advertising text, branding and forms</p> <p>c. Provide guidance/support and education for recruitment team and hiring managers in providing adjustments throughout recruitment processes</p> <p>d. Monitor and assess outcomes (for internal use and feedback to APSC)</p>	Human Resources	December 2016	<p>Completion of information material and implementation of RecruitAbility on all new vacancies by 30 September 2016.</p> <p>Increase in representation of employees with disability to at least:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 percent by 30 June 2017 • 2.8 percent by 30 June 2018 • 3.5 percent by 30 June 2019.
2	<p>Explore opportunities to partner with Disability Employment Services Providers (see Appendix B) to reach more job seekers with disability and explore opportunities to promote roles through Disability Employment Service Program Providers</p>	Human Resources	<p>Existing suppliers advised March 2017</p> <p>Establishment of panel of specialist supplier/s by March 2017</p>	<p>Increase in the number of roles sent to Disability Employment Services for candidate sourcing.</p> <p>Increase in representation of employees with disability to at least:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 percent by 30 June 2017 • 2.8 percent by 30 June 2018 • 3.5 percent by 30 June 2019.

Retention and Advancement				
	Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Outcome / Measurement
6	Provide tailored support for managers and colleagues of people with disability a. Provide disability awareness and confidence training for all staff b. Managers are encouraged to identify own capability gaps and explore learning needs, with Human Resources to provide support in identifying suitable training opportunities c. Ensure Health and Safety Representatives are appropriately trained on responding to the needs of employees with a disability, including in the procedures for emergency management and evacuations.	All employees All supervisors Human Resources	December 2016 As required	Intranet resources provided, training available, relevant procedures updated, responsive to requests.

Inclusive Workplace Culture				
	Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Outcome / Measurement
7	<p>Improve staff awareness and understanding of disability</p> <p>a. Publish the <i>Disability Action Plan 2016-2019</i> on the Intranet and promote key activities/events through a range of communication channels</p> <p>b. Develop an intranet resource that outlines support for employees with a disability</p> <p>c. Improve understanding and awareness of unconscious bias</p> <p>d. Develop informational material on a range of disability-related issues (available in easy-to-access format via the intranet)</p>	Human Resources Internal Communications Manager Cultural Reference Group	Ongoing	<p>Increase in the number of employees who identify as having disability in Aurion</p> <p>Improved engagement of employees with disability, measured by data collected from the APS Census</p>
8	<p>Recognise International Day of People with Disability (3 December) annually</p> <p>a. Explore (in consultation with staff) appropriate ways to promote the annual theme Eg. People Seminar, guest speaker, internal/external events</p>	Cultural Reference Group	December (annually)	<p>Recognise International Day of People with Disability</p> <p>Increase in the number of employees who identify as having disability in Aurion</p> <p>Improved engagement of employees with disability, measured by data collected from the APS Census</p>
9	<p>Improve leadership capability on disability inclusion</p> <p>a. Engage an SES-level Disability Champion to act as a positive role model within Geoscience Australia and influence the actions and behaviours of managers and staff</p> <p>b. Expand the guidance and support provided to managers on how to respond to disability issues and requests for adjustments, including training where suitable (eg. mental health first-aid training)</p> <p>c. Encourage and reward inclusive behaviours through existing means, including Recognition and Awards Program, performance review process and talent management framework</p>	Human Resources	<p>Champion identified and engaged by September 2016</p> <p>Intranet resources established by December 2016</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Increase in the number of employees who identify as having disability in Aurion</p> <p>Improved engagement of employees with disability, measured by data collected from the APS Census</p> <p>Positive qualitative feedback received directly by Human Resources and via the Cultural Reference Group from employees</p>

Inclusive Workplace Culture				
	Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Outcome / Measurement
				and managers
10	<p>Explore the formation of a Disability Support Network for Geoscience Australia staff</p> <p>a. Consult with employees to assess interest levels</p> <p>b. Research the experiences of other APS Agencies on Disability Support Networks</p> <p>c. Establish network including purpose, funding for activities/events and appoint a liaison as a touch-point with Cultural Reference Group for ongoing monitoring/support</p> <p><i>(Note: If there is insufficient interest from staff, the Diversity Network will initially perform the function of a Disability Support Network)</i></p>	Human Resources	By December 2016	<p>Increase in the number of employees who identify as having disability in Aurion</p> <p>Improved engagement of employees with disability, measured by data collected from the APS Census</p>

Community Partnerships				
	Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Outcome / Measurement
11	Participate in the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) Disability Champions Network (see Appendix C) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Senior Executive Service (SES) level Disability Champion registered to attend quarterly Australian Public Service Commission Disability Champions Network meetings b. Contribute to Government-wide initiatives and activities arising from Network participation c. Explore and adopt new initiatives arising from Network participation at Geoscience Australia as appropriate 	Human Resources	30 September 2016	Successful implementation of this Action Plan and future diversity initiatives Improvement of Geoscience Australia's external profile toward becoming an employer of choice for people with disability
12	Join the Australian Network on Disability (AND) and Diversity Council of Australia (DCA) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Explore and evaluate further opportunities to connect with other organisations/agencies and collaborate on disability inclusion initiatives 	Human Resources	September 2017	Improvement of Geoscience Australia's external profile toward becoming an employer of choice for people with disability

For further information or queries on Geoscience Australia's Disability Action Plan 2016-2019 please contact the HR Strategy team at hrstrategy@ga.gov.au

Appendix A RecruitAbility Overview

RecruitAbility is an affirmative measure that provides for progression of applicants with disability to the next stage in a selection process if they have been assessed as meeting the minimum requirements of the job.

The aims are to:

- support the increased representation of people with disability in the Australian Public Service
- improve disability confidence of hiring managers
- improve confidence of people with disability to put forward their skills and capabilities

Legislative basis

The legislative basis that provides for RecruitAbility is set out in clause 2.17A of the Australian Public Service Commissioner's Directions 2013 (the Directions).

Engagement and promotion decisions must still be made on merit in accordance with the Act.

Principles

- Applicants with disability who apply under RecruitAbility and meet minimum requirements are progressed to the next stage of a selection process.
- There is no displacement of applicants who would otherwise have been shortlisted for further assessment.
- Agencies manage their recruitment activities within the boundaries of legislation and policy.

(Source: Australian Public Service Commission)

Further information can be found at <http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications-and-media/current-publications/recruitability-agencies-guide>

Appendix B Disability Employment Service Providers Overview

The Australian Government funds a national network of private and not-for-profit organisations to support people with disability to prepare for, secure and maintain work. Their purpose is to support both employers and candidates to establish sustainable employment relationships.

This support includes:

- a. presentation of candidates for vacancies
- b. training and information for managers and co-workers
- c. assistance with developing job descriptions that clearly articulate the core requirements of a role
- d. assistance with job redesign and workplace modifications to overcome barriers
- e. ongoing training and support for employees
- f. access to work experience placements
- g. a range of other services.

Most services are provided at no cost to the employer.

Further information is available at <https://www.employment.gov.au/disability-employment-services>

Appendix C APS Disability Champions Network

The role of the Disability Champion is to:

- Champion equal access and inclusion for people with disability in the agency
- Advocate good practice relating to employment policies and processes
- Provide leadership to drive disability-related employment initiatives and organisational change to create workplaces that value and support people with disability
- Commit to understanding the barriers and representing the rights of employees with disability across the agency and the APS more broadly
- Attend and speak at internal and external events promoting the inclusion of people with disability
- Attend Diversity Champion Network and other relevant events
- Provide high level endorsement and support to the agency member of the disability employee Community of Practice, including support for practical solutions identified

Full Terms of Reference can be found at <http://www.apsc.gov.au/managing-in-the-aps/disability/disability-champions>.

(Source: Australian Public Service Commission)