



**AEMS** AUSLSA ENVIRONMENTAL  
MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

MANUAL  
2012

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## 1 Scheme overview

### 1.1 Introduction to AusLSA Environmental Management System (AEMS)

The Australian Legal Sector Alliance (AusLSA), in partnership with the non-profit Net Balance Foundation, has developed a tailored Environmental Management System (EMS) framework for the legal industry. AEMS will help your firm to adopt a systematic approach to environmental management by identifying and addressing its environmental impacts.

An EMS is a framework of procedures that helps an organisation to identify and achieve its environmental goals. The EMS does not dictate a level of environmental performance that must be achieved; rather it is tailored to each organisation's business and goals. An EMS can be likened to an extension of firms' existing risk management systems: the concepts and processes are quite similar, but with a specifically environmental focus.

The AEMS framework is modelled on ISO14001, the international standard for EMSs. The most relevant elements of ISO14001 have been selected for inclusion into AEMS with the goal of building a system that is customised for the legal sector: rigorous but not onerous in its application and cost effective to implement.

AEMS Certification will be available to those firms that have successfully implemented an aligned with these guidelines. Certification is based on a set of criteria and benchmarks that have been developed for the industry and will:

- Recognise that firm's commitment to environmental management
- Assist in responses to supply chain questionnaires relating to sustainability and environmental management.

AEMS has been developed with assistance from the Net Balance Foundation, the not-for-profit arm of Net Balance Management Group ([www.netbalance.com](http://www.netbalance.com)). Net Balance Foundation conducts open source sustainability research and provides sustainability advisory services to organisations that may not be able to pay the usual cost of these services.

### 1.2 Benefits of participating in AEMS

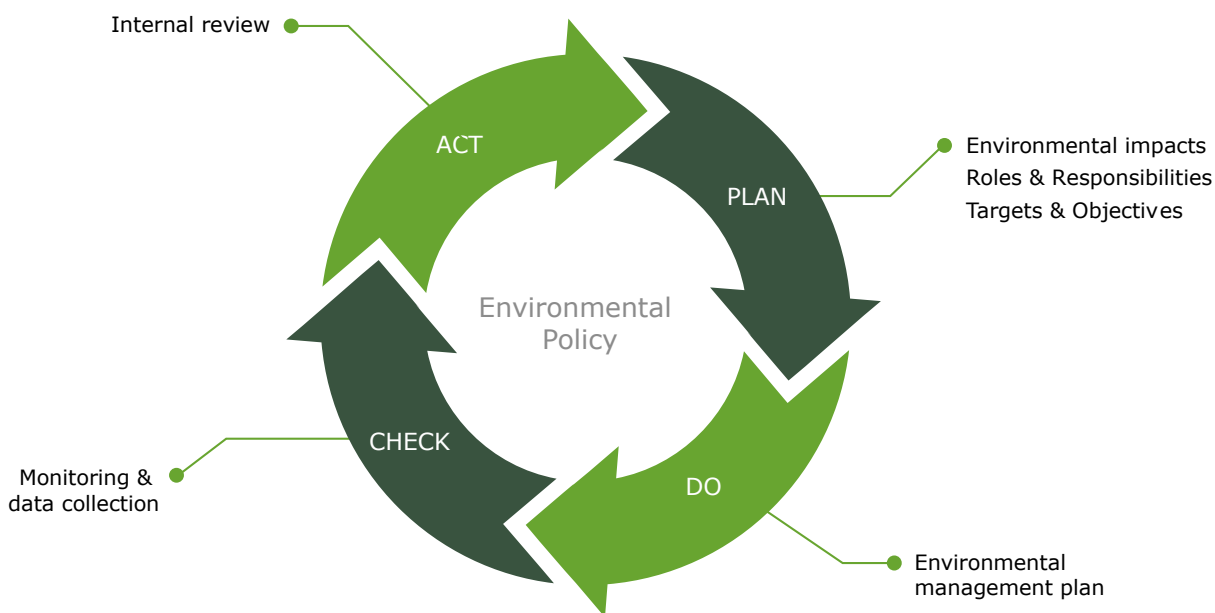
The ultimate objective of an EMS is to develop a systematic approach to the identification and management of an organisation's environmental impacts that will inevitably lead to reducing those impacts.

The objective of AEMS is to provide AusLSA Members with an EMS framework that is customised for the legal industry which:

- Can act as a stepping stone towards full ISO14001 certification
- Delivers a certified EMS as per the identified requirements in competitive tenders and sustainable supply chain questionnaires
- Is recognised by procurement managers in the financial sector
- Offers a simple, guided implementation process
- Includes scope to extend with additional ISO14001 elements and/or modules for monitoring of social impacts
- Is cost effective

- | Builds on firms existing environmental strategies
- | Builds on existing AusLSA programs and resources
- | Delivers an environmental management plan
- | Communicates to stakeholders that sustainability is taken seriously and is embedded within the firm’s operations
- | Contributes to the development of a legal sector specific Environmental Management Good Practice Checklist for all AusLSA Members.

### 1.3 Structure of the AusLSA Environmental Management System



An EMS is based on the *Plan-Do-Check-Act* cyclical concept of continuous improvement. This approach encourages organisations to build on previous efforts to achieve better results in future years.

The diagram illustrates how the core elements of the AEMS work together to drive continuous improvement in environmental performance. The Environmental Policy defines the scope and objectives of the entire framework, and is very much at the core of the EMS. Further guidance on each of the EMS elements is provided in the following sections of this manual.

### 1.4 Scope of the AusLSA Environmental Management System

The AEMS should be used to manage the environmental responsibilities, impacts and opportunities associated with your firm’s business operations. In order to develop an understanding of AEMS prior to a full rollout, firms can opt to initially implement the AEMS across a limited scope (such as an individual office or state). However ultimately, the AEMS should apply, at a minimum, to all of your firm’s Australian facilities. Specifically, it should cover:

- | office buildings
- | office consumables
- | fleet vehicles

- | business travel
- | contractor activities on site
- | new builds and fit-outs.

The AEMS can also be used to help address and manage indirect impacts associated with customers and supply chain where appropriate.

## 1.5 Tiered structure

AusLSA and Net Balance Foundation aim to extend the AEMS. Once the first, basic level of certification is in place, the criteria and elements for additional tiers and modules will be developed (subject to member interest). A review of the ISO14001 Standard and the most material issues for law firms will determine the inclusion of additional elements and stipulate stricter criteria. This will provide scope for further improvement and hopefully lead to firms setting more ambitious targets.

As AusLSA expands to include social sustainability, additional modules will be developed for the management framework that helps law firms identify, manage and improve their social impacts.

## 1.6 AEMS Certification

To achieve AEMS Certification, your firm must undergo an external review of the EMS every two years. Only firms that have completed this review are permitted to use the AEMS Certification logo below.



This external review will help to ensure that your AEMS has been implemented correctly. It will also provide firms with access to environmental professionals who will provide feedback on how to improve your approach, systems and performance. Access to this knowledge and information will provide an invaluable learning opportunity for your AEMS team and the firm.

The external review process will require you to provide documentary evidence related to the firm's environmental policy, targets, programs and performance. It will also require a brief interview (either via telephone or in person) with the person who is responsible for the management of your EMS. The reviewer undertaking the external review must be satisfied that the firm has systems and practices in place that assist you to meet your targets. Once the reviewer is satisfied, AEMS Certification will be awarded to your firm.

To arrange for an external review of your EMS in line with the AEMS, please contact [aems@legalsectoralliance.com.au](mailto:aems@legalsectoralliance.com.au).

## Engage and Embed

An EMS can function as the core of an organisation-wide environmental strategy. As such it represents an opportunity to get staff involved in determining the goals and objectives of the strategy and thereby embed sustainability in your firm. The AusLSA Staff Engagement Toolkit (under development) could be a useful resource to help you engage staff, identify champions and procure input to both your EMS and your broader sustainability strategy. The following chart from the AusLSA toolkit provides an effective engagement process.

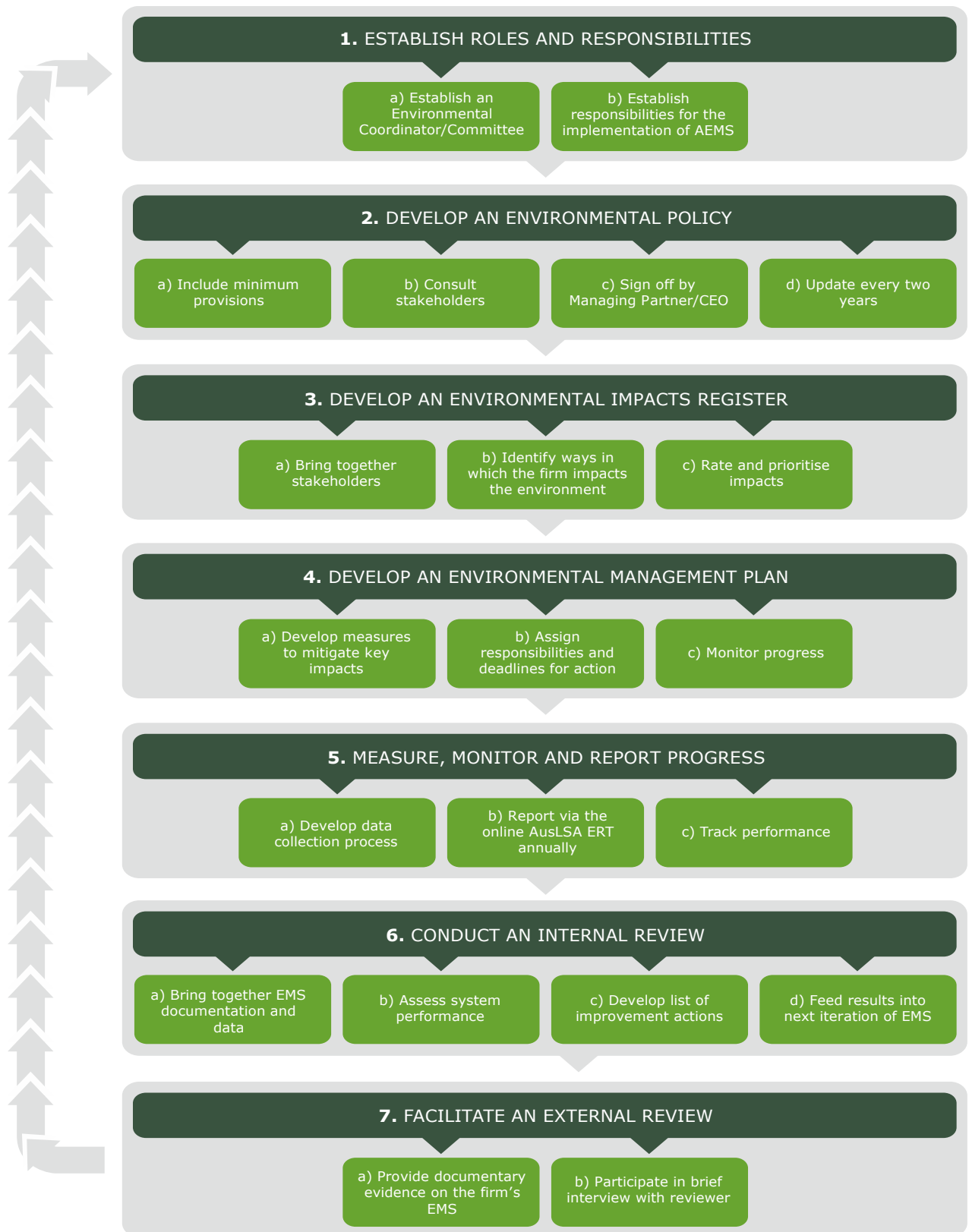


## 2 Process Summary

The instructions laid out in the following sections are a summary of the process to establish an EMS, including good practice examples and some advice on implementation. Templates are provided in the Appendices to this guide.

The chart below illustrates the key steps associated with the development and implementation of an EMS that aligns with the AEMS framework. In order to achieve AEMS certification firms must implement all elements and complete the checklist (Appendix A) to the satisfaction of the external reviewer.

While the EMS is represented as a linear process in this AEMS guide, it is actually an iterative process with the starting point and pathway for each firm dependent upon what systems are already in place. A flexible approach is recommended to allow for review of previous steps as your firm's understanding of, and objectives for, your EMS evolve.



The information below summarises each of the steps highlighted in the diagram above. Section 3 provides detailed guidance on the procedures involved.



## 2.1 Establish roles and responsibilities

To drive implementation of the EMS and ensure accountability and ownership of the system, various roles and responsibilities need to be assigned. Because of the iterative nature of EMS development, it may not be possible to assign all roles immediately and once the firm has begun to examine its environmental impacts (through steps 2.3 and 2.4) these roles may change. Remember that this should be an evolving and flexible process that can be altered to suit your firm's situation and needs.

### 2.1.1 Establish roles

Driving the process will require the assignment of roles and accountabilities. This may take the form of an Environmental Coordinator or perhaps an Environmental Committee. You may however already have a suitable structure in place which can be assigned accountability for delivery of the EMS. The purpose of assigning roles and accountabilities is to drive the process internally, communicate objectives and progress and facilitate the certification process. AEMS is not prescriptive on how the firm should administrate its EMS and the firm should choose a method that suits its structure, culture and objectives.

### 2.1.2 Establish responsibilities for the implementation of the AEMS

Successful implementation of the AEMS requires the support of a number of stakeholders throughout the firm. The table below summarises the key roles and the associated responsibilities. The responsibilities for each stage of the AEMS are detailed throughout chapter 3.

Role	Responsibility
<b>Board/ Partnership/ Managing Partner/ CEO (Board)</b>	- Sign-off on Environmental Policy
<b>Executive Management Team (EMT)/Practice Manager (EMT)</b>	- Support the Environmental Coordinator role(s)
<b>Environmental Coordinator or Environmental Management Committee (Coordinator) or other suitable coordination structure</b>	- Implement and maintain the EMS
<b>Staff and contractors</b>	- Comply with EMS requirements

## 2.2 Develop an Environmental Policy

An EMS is built around an organisation's Environmental Policy. This document sets out the organisation's commitment to managing its environmental impacts.

You may not need to start from scratch as your firm may have an existing policy or even documented environmental commitments, charters, statements or strategies that can be adapted for use as an Environmental Policy. Initially, it might be useful to develop a draft Policy that can be refined and finalised later in the process, once the firm further understands its environmental impacts, objectives and goals. In most cases, the first version of the Policy is not what is signed off by the organisation. Remember to remain flexible and to integrate new information and learnings along the way.

### 2.2.1 Ensure minimum inclusions are met

There are a number of essential inclusions to an Environmental Policy, for example a brief description of the organisation's key environmental impacts and a commitment to continuous improvement of environmental management.

### 2.2.2 Consult stakeholders

Once a draft Environmental Policy is prepared, it should be discussed internally to ensure that it is complete, accurate and aligned with the organisation's strategic objectives and internal systems. Information contained in the Environmental Management Plan (step 3.3) should be discussed with stakeholders to ensure that what has been proposed is both meaningful and achievable. New information and learnings from these engagement activities should be used to further refine and tailor the content of the Policy.

### 2.2.3 Sign off by Board

As for any of your organisation's policies, once the Environmental Policy is finalised it should be signed and dated by the most senior person or governance body within your firm. This process:

- Ensures that the organisation's commitment to responsible environmental management is enshrined at the highest level
- Gives credibility to the Environmental Policy
- Helps mobilise internal support for environmental management.

### 2.2.4 Update every two years

EMSs are not static; they should evolve over time, in line with changes within an organisation and changes in understanding of environmental issues. It is therefore important that the Environmental Policy is updated to reflect these changes on a regular basis (every two years).

## 2.3 Develop an Environmental Impacts Register

The Environmental Impacts Register is a table of an organisation's environmental impacts, each of which have been rated and prioritised according to their significance. It is very similar to an organisational risk register, and the process for developing it is similar to a risk assessment process.

### 2.3.1 Consult with appropriate staff

The strength of an Environmental Impacts Register will be largely determined by the appropriateness of the people involved in its development. It is important to include people from across different business functions and operational locations, as this will ensure that all perspectives are brought to bear in considering the environmental impacts of an organisation. Relevant people may come from facilities, corporate affairs, legal (fee earner) and finance teams.

### 2.3.2 Identify ways in which the firm impacts the environment

Appropriate staff should work together to ensure the whole range of environmental impacts that the firm has, from electricity and paper consumption through to air travel and waste disposal, are identified.

### 2.3.3 Rate and prioritise impacts

The identified environmental impacts should then be rated. The way in which you undertake this rating should be tailored to the way your firm understands risk. The most common way of undertaking this work is the use of a standard risk rating matrix of likelihood and consequence to determine significance. Using this method, each environmental impact is prioritised by significance, to rank and provide an indication of the organisation's key environmental impacts.

An alternate method for ranking and prioritising each impact is through broad stakeholder engagement. This may be undertaken through an internal staff survey and/or an external stakeholder survey. Priorities could then be assigned based upon the prevalence of feedback received.

The most important aspect of this step is to develop an approach that is meaningful to your firm. Where possible established risk processes and language should be used to ensure that the results are readily understandable.

## 2.4 Develop an Environmental Management Plan

Environmental Management Plans (EMPs) set out how an organisation intends to address its key environmental impacts. They should include timeframes and responsibilities, so progress can be monitored over time.

### 2.4.1 Develop a list of measures to mitigate key impacts

For each key impact identified in the Environmental Impacts Register, mitigation measure(s) should be developed and recorded in an Environmental Management Plan. Care should be taken to ensure that mitigation measures are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely).

AusLSA is aiming to collate the mitigation measures developed by each firm for their EMPs and use them to build up an Environmental Management Good Practice Checklist for law firms that can be shared with all AusLSA Members. It is expected that this process will also create further opportunities for AusLSA case studies and knowledge sharing.

### 2.4.2 Assign responsibilities and deadlines for action

Every mitigation measure should be allocated to an individual, along with a deadline for action. This provides accountability and transparency to ensure that the initiatives identified in the EMP are followed through into action.

### 2.4.3 Monitor progress

EMPs should be revisited on a regular basis (at least every 6 months) to ensure they are proceeding as planned. Documenting this procedure will provide evidence that may be useful for future environmental audits and/or application for ISO14001 certification.

## 2.5 Measure, monitor and report progress

**AusLSA Members reporting their environmental impacts to AusLSA through the Environmental Reporting Tool (ERT) have already largely fulfilled this component of AEMS.**

Reporting AusLSA Members are already collecting data, monitoring their environmental impacts and reporting their progress to key stakeholders. Nevertheless it will still be beneficial for Reporting Members to review these processes for improvement opportunities and to ensure that they align to the EMS.

### 2.5.1 Develop data collection process

Many organisations do not have effective systems for capturing environmental data. It is therefore important to establish internal processes to collect this information in an accurate and streamlined way that is also aligned to existing business processes. Data collection processes should be properly documented so that they are effective and repeatable.

### 2.5.2 Report via the AusLSA Environmental Reporting Tool annually

The AusLSA ERT is an online analysis and reporting tool that is available to each AusLSA member. Members are encouraged to enter their environmental data into the tool each year to get a better understanding of their performance. Members are given the option of including their ERT data in the publicly released annual AusLSA report.

### 2.5.3 Track progress

Reporting of performance through AusLSA allows Members to monitor their performance over time. This allows for firms' environmental initiatives to be assessed for effectiveness, and also provides important information to the organisation about the changing nature of its environmental impacts.

## 2.6 Conduct an internal review

To 'close the loop' and promote continuous improvement of environmental performance, it is essential to conduct an internal review. The results of the internal review should be used to feed into updates in EMS processes, plans and monitoring systems.

### 2.6.1 Bring together EMS documentation and data

The organisation's EMS documentation, comprising the materials developed during the steps outlined above, should be collated and organised prior to the review.

### 2.6.2 Assess system performance

The efficacy of the EMS should then be assessed to determine the suitability of its components for the firm and the environmental impacts it has committed to manage. This step should involve ensuring that all required elements of the EMS have been developed, are appropriate to the firms impacts and that all activities and mitigation measures have proceeded as planned. It may also involve reviewing environmental reports to assess organisational performance over time.

### 2.6.3 Develop list of improvement actions

Based on the assessment template, a list of improvement actions should be developed. These actions should aim to fill any gaps in the EMS, and drive performance enhancements. They may also be aimed at streamlining the efficiency of the EMS, or merging it with existing business processes.

### 2.6.4 Feed results into next iteration of EMS

To complete the cycle of the EMS, the results of the internal review should be used to inform updates to the EMS processes, plans and monitoring systems.

## 2.7 Facilitate an external review

To achieve AEMS Certification your firm must complete an external review of the EMS every two years. In addition to providing the firm with confidence that the system is working to improve environmental performance, the external reviewer will provide recommendations and feedback on how to improve the system and your approach.

### 2.7.1 Provide documentary evidence on the firm's EMS

Collate documentary evidence related to the firm's Environmental Policy, targets, programs and performance and provide them to the external reviewer.

### 2.7.2 Participate in brief interview with reviewer

Participate in a brief face-to-face or phone interview with the reviewer. The reviewer undertaking the external review must be satisfied that the firm has systems and practices in place that assist you to meet your targets. Once the reviewer is satisfied, AEMS Certification will be awarded to your firm.