



# Voluntary Data Classification Framework

## Project Update – May 2025

In this newsletter, we share insights from our initial industry engagement.

### Industry engagement

Facilitated by the Australian Cyber Collaboration Centre (Aus3C), we led industry engagement through an online survey and five workshops across Australia. Around 15 broad industry sectors, representing businesses of all sizes in the Australian economy were consulted. We had experts and non-experts, large companies and start-ups. The feedback collected provides valuable insights into how a framework might benefit Australian industry.

### What we have learned

Some of the major findings are around current practice, challenges, and how industry think a framework could enable consistent and unified data classification.

#### Data classification labels

While many organisations classify and label data, there is no universal approach across industry. The *Protective Security Policy Framework (PSPF)*, is the most prominent but is mostly used within government and in interactions with government. Our engagement identified that the most common classification labels used by industry were 'Sensitive', 'Personal', 'Confidential' and 'Official'. It was clear the meanings of these labels and their impact on data handling were not universally agreed.

#### Current challenges with data classification

A variety of challenges were identified. Major themes include:

- time commitment
- lack of understanding and data literacy of employees
- understanding complex systems for compliance
- external providers having different processes
- misclassification, inconsistency, and over and under classification.

#### Industry ideas on how a framework might help

Some of the recurrent ideas from Industry include:

- improve understanding of risk related to data
- improve data handling and security
- develop a common language, classification or schema

- enable interoperability
- improve education and awareness
- tools to assist data classification.

#### Other important considerations

It was reinforced that an ideal framework would be 'simple', making it easy for industry to adopt. If possible, it would enable larger companies to 'map' current internal classifications into the framework for use with externals.

### Next steps

#### Design

We are in the early stages of the design phase for the framework. Our goal is to design a framework that establishes a 'common language' for all Australian businesses that describes how classified data should be handled internally and across organisations.

Building upon this foundation, we are considering optional modules and functionality such as:

- assessing the level of risk in data
- expressing the assessed level of risk in data
- a simple guide (or guides), especially for SMEs
- additional markers to express the nature of risk.

Further, we're seeking to draw on as much existing material and systems as we can to help with compatibility, interoperability, and to aid with adoption. Our focus and design may shift as we reflect further on the insights.

#### Pilot

We are considering options for the pilot, particularly in response to industry expertise and engagement through the workshops.

### We're still listening!

The initial consultation process has been completed, however if you would like to find out more about the project or contribute, please email the CSIRO project team at [DataClassification@csiro.au](mailto:DataClassification@csiro.au).