

Global-Grade Environmental Due Diligence, Built for Local Ground Truth

A whitepaper on how environmental risk data in Australia fell behind the market it was meant to protect, and what changed to close that gap.

Key Takeaways

- Flood risk has already erased \$42.2 billion in value from Australian properties, with more than two million properties, one in six nationally, carrying meaningful exposure.
- PFAS contamination has been confirmed at 315 locations in Australian drinking water systems, with roughly six million Australians affected and about 30 towns exceeding national thresholds.
- Environmental due diligence in Australia has historically relied on static, one-time reports that are slow to cross-reference against overlapping hazards.
- ATLAS is an interactive, browser-based mapping platform that layers current and historical environmental data, letting users isolate flood, fire, bush fire, and PFAS hazards individually rather than reading them out of a single dense document.
- ATLAS Australia runs on Land Insight's local property data, now powered by Envirosearch, combined with Envirosearch's global archive of more than 2,300 verified environmental and historical sources.
- The platform's defensibility standard shifted for the Australian market: rather than ASTM E1527 and EPA All Appropriate Inquiries, ATLAS Australia is built around Commonwealth, state, and territory regulations and the NEPM.
- The risk and the platform both apply equally to commercial and residential property, even though much of the published Australian data is reported at the residential level.



A different way to look at a familiar problem

In 2024, more than 723,000 properties changed hands across Australia's mainland states, and by most measures it was an unremarkable year for the market.¹ Deals closed the way property deals generally close, with a buyer securing finance, a lender running its usual checks, and a consultant producing a report that got filed away somewhere in a due diligence folder and rarely looked at again once settlement went through.

What almost none of those transactions accounted for was the fact that the risks sitting underneath them, flood exposure, soil and groundwater contamination, chemical residue from decades of industrial use, had grown considerably larger and more expensive than most people realised. The tools used to measure that risk had not kept pace with how much of it there actually was.

This paper is an attempt to explain that gap, and to describe a tool that is trying to close it. One clarification before going further: everything described here applies just as much to commercial property as it does to residential property. Water does not check a zoning classification before it rises over a riverbank, and a contaminated aquifer does not distinguish between the warehouse sitting above it and the house next door. Much of the data available publicly in Australia happens to be reported at the residential level, so that is where a lot of the numbers below come from. But the pattern those numbers describe holds just as true for a logistics centre or an office tower as it does for a family home.

The hidden cost nobody priced in

Australia's environmental consulting services market was valued at an estimated US\$751.9 million in 2025 and is forecast to reach US\$1.19 billion by 2034.¹ That is a considerable amount of money being spent to answer one basic question: is a given property safe to buy, to build on, or to lend against. For a long time, the answer that industry provided seemed adequate. Then researchers went back and actually measured what flood exposure alone had done to property values over the past two decades, and the resulting figure was larger than almost anyone in the industry expected.

That figure is \$42.2 billion. It represents the total value flood risk has already erased from Australian properties, according to a joint analysis conducted by the Climate Council and PropTrack using more than twenty years of sales data.^{2,3} The number is not a projection or a model of what might happen by 2050. It reflects value that has already disappeared, embedded quietly in the price gap between a flood-affected property and an otherwise identical one that has never flooded.

A few details from that research make the scale of the problem easier to grasp. One in six Australian properties, more than two million of them, now carries meaningful flood exposure.² Queensland and New South Wales together account for seventy percent of those at-risk properties.^{2,4} And the clearest single data point in the entire study involves an ordinary three-

bedroom, two-bathroom home: a property with that flood exposure sells for \$75,500 less than a nearly identical home a few streets away with no such history.^{2,4} There is little reason to think that discount disappears once the asset in question becomes a shopping centre or a distribution warehouse sitting on the same flood plain. If anything, the dollar figure involved tends to grow with the size of the asset.

Contamination follows a somewhat different path, and it is worth noting that this one begins almost entirely in industrial and commercial activity rather than residential life. PFAS, the group of long-lasting synthetic chemicals once widely used in firefighting foam and various manufacturing processes, has now been detected at 315 confirmed locations in Australian drinking water systems.^{5,6} Roughly six million Australians, close to a quarter of the country's population, are currently drinking water that contains PFAS at levels below the current guideline threshold.⁵ Around thirty towns exceed the newest national limits entirely.⁶ A new regulatory framework called the National Environment Management Plan is now compelling water utilities and site owners, a great many of them industrial operators, to spend money on remediation they had not previously budgeted for.⁶ The chemical entered the environment through commercial use. The financial and public health consequences are now landing broadly, well beyond the industrial sites where the contamination originated.

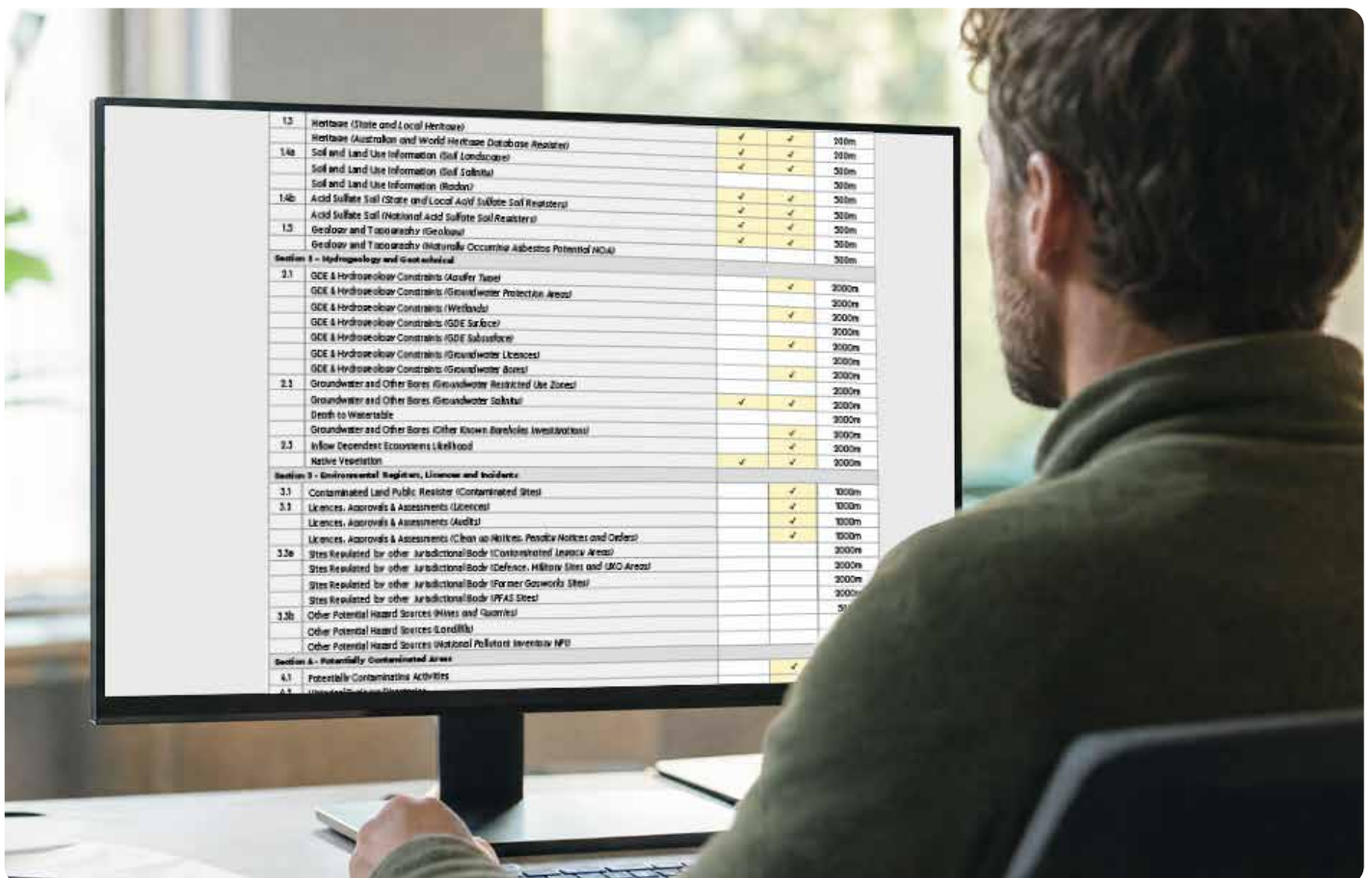


Why the old reports stopped being enough

For most of its history, the environmental due diligence industry has operated according to a consistent routine. A client requests a report. Some time passes while that report is compiled. Eventually a document arrives, usually dense with technical data and comparatively thin on interpretation, and it becomes the job of whoever receives it to work out what the findings mean for the transaction under consideration.

A static report can confirm that a given site falls within a mapped flood zone, but it cannot easily reveal that the same site also overlaps with a contaminated land register, or that a PFAS-affected parcel sits only a short distance from a proposed development boundary.

That approach was reasonably well suited to a slower market and to risks that were simpler to isolate one at a time. It is far less well suited to conditions today. For years, consultants have closed that gap manually, cross-referencing one map against another and one database against the next. Multiply that manual effort across the more than 723,000 property transactions occurring in Australia each year, and the cumulative cost in time and attention becomes substantial.¹



What ATLAS actually is

It helps to be specific here, because ATLAS is not simply a re-branded version of the reports the industry has relied on for decades. It is a SaaS platform, meaning it lives in a browser rather than in a folder of downloaded PDFs, and it was built around a single idea: that environmental risk is easier to understand when you can see it laid out spatially, one layer at a time, rather than described in paragraphs of technical text.^{8,9}

Open ATLAS on a given property and the first thing you encounter is an interactive map centred on that address. From there, a user can filter the surrounding area by which environmental database they want to see, by distance from the subject property, and by elevation relative to that property, which matters enormously for anyone trying to understand which nearby contamination sources could plausibly reach the site in question through groundwater flow.⁸ That filtering is not a minor convenience. It is the difference between staring at a report listing forty nearby contaminated sites and being able to see, immediately, which three of them sit upgradient and close enough to matter.

A meaningful part of that filtering comes down to natural hazard map controls that can be switched on and off individually, rather than absorbed all at once from a single dense report. A user can isolate flood hazard on its own, then layer in bush fire and broader fire hazard zones, then bring in PFAS-affected sites, and examine each one against the subject property before deciding which combination actually matters for the site in question.^{8,11} That kind of control turns a due diligence review into a series of specific questions rather than one overwhelming document, which is a meaningfully different way of working through the same information.

Layered on top of that current-day data sits a set of historical references: old aerial photographs, topographic maps, fire insurance plans, and city directories, each of which can be faded in and out using an opacity slider so a user can compare what a site looked like decades ago against what sits there now.^{8,9} This is where a lot of legacy contamination actually gets found, not in a current land use register,

but in a hundred-year-old photograph showing a fuel depot or a dry cleaner where a shopping centre now stands. Combined with the historic aerial photography referenced earlier, spanning well over a million images, this historical layer turns ATLAS into something closer to a time-lapse of a property's environmental past rather than a single snapshot of its present.^{9,12}

The platform's relationship with regulatory standards is worth tracing carefully, because it changed as ATLAS crossed into a new market. In its original form, ATLAS was built around alignment with ASTM E1527 and the United States Environmental Protection Agency's All Appropriate Inquiries standard, the two frameworks that govern what counts as a legally defensible Phase I environmental site assessment in the United States.⁸ Those standards do not carry over to Australia, and ATLAS was not simply exported as-is. In the Australian version of the platform, that same commitment to defensibility is instead built around the relevant Commonwealth, state, and territory government regulations, together with the National Environment Protection (Assessment of Site Contamination) Measure, commonly known as the NEPM, which sets the framework Australian regulators use to determine what counts as an adequate assessment of site contamination.¹ **The specific standard changed. The underlying intent, that the platform should produce work a regulator would accept, did not.**

What changed with Land Insight

Land Insight built its reputation in the Australian market around a fairly simple promise: an environmental risk report for any property in the country, delivered within twenty-four hours.⁷ That promise earned the company real trust among consultants and property professionals. In 2025, the company became part of something larger. Land Insight is now powered by Envirosite, and the Australian property data it had built over the years has been integrated directly into ATLAS.^{8,9}

What this means in practice is that the specific ATLAS capabilities described above, the filterable interactive map, the natural hazard controls, and the historical

overlays, are no longer available only for North American properties. They are now built on top of an Australian data foundation, which includes national-scale coverage of flood, fire, bush fire, and contamination hazards organised down to the level of individual property addresses across commercial, industrial, and residential parcels alike.¹¹ Combine that local foundation with Envirosite's broader global archive of more than 2,300 verified environmental and historical sources, and an Australian user gets substantial depth from the ATLAS platform rather than a scaled-down regional version of it.^{9,12}

Who actually benefits

Consider how differently four kinds of professionals might use this same information.

An environmental consultant, who once spent days manually cross-referencing separate databases to complete a single site assessment, can now assemble most of that same picture within a single interactive session.^{8,9} A lender, reviewing exposure across an entire loan portfolio rather than one property at a time, gains a meaningful advantage given that flood risk alone has already erased \$42.2 billion in Australian property value.^{2,3} A developer or planner can review decades of site history and overlapping hazards well before design work even begins, whether the project underway is a warehouse, an office building, or a residential subdivision. And a buyer, whether purchasing on behalf of a company or for their own family, gains access to the same standard of due diligence infrastructure long used by professionals across North America, now built specifically on Australian ground truth.^{9,10}



The point of all this

Australia's property market, taken as a whole, has grown past the tools that were once used to measure its own risk. The evidence supporting that claim is difficult to dismiss: billions of dollars in eroded value, millions of exposed properties, hundreds of confirmed contamination sites, all sitting beneath a due diligence process still largely built around static, one-time reports.

The underlying risk was always present, sitting in flood plains, in old industrial sites, and in water supplies across the country. What has changed is whether the people responsible for property decisions can see that risk clearly enough, and early enough, to act on it.

ATLAS Australia, running on EnviroSite's platform and built on Land Insight's local data, represents an attempt to close that particular gap, not through a faster report, but through an entirely different way of looking at a site: layered, spatial, historical, and interactive rather than flat and static.

The best way to understand ATLAS is to see the environmental information come together spatially. **Book a demo** by visiting **landinsight.co/atlas** or emailing **info@landinsight.co**

Sources

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