

How to identify protected and confidential information

Guidance note

July 2025

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Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	File naming	2
3	Identification of public information	3
4	Identification of confidential information.....	4
4.1	Confidential information – redacted	5
5	Identification of protected SOCI information.....	6
5.1	Protected SOCI information – redacted.....	7
6	Identification of protected SOCI and confidential information.....	8
6.1	Protected SOCI information – redacted.....	9
6.2	Protected SOCI and confidential - redacted	10
	Appendix A – Visual guide.....	10
	Glossary.....	14

1 Introduction

Information submitted to the AER is increasing in complexity. The complexity reflects obligations to identify information that meets the definition of protected information under section 5A of the Security of Critical Infrastructure Act 2018¹ (protected SOCI information), as well as personal information and other confidential information. The AER is concerned that any confusion about how to identify different types of information may lead to information being disclosed when it shouldn't be. Some issues we have observed include:

- inconsistencies between confidentiality claims and confidentiality markings /redactions
- document cover pages, headers, footers or watermarks not aligning with the document classification (for example, a public document has the word CONFIDENTIAL on the cover page)
- redactions not being correctly applied, so redacted information can still be revealed.

We have developed this Guidance Note to help regulated businesses better understand and meet their obligations to identify different types of information. It focusses on information submissions that are prepared in response to regulatory information notices (RINs) or regulatory information orders. This Guidance Note is complementary to the reporting requirements set out in relevant regulatory information instruments, including those used for regulatory proposals, and annual information requirements.

This guidance note does not address necessary steps for regulated businesses to assess and categorise their information. We expect each business to have a good understanding of the information they need to protect in accordance with the SOCI Act, based on the definitions and obligations set out in the Act. Similarly, we expect each business to have robust processes in place to identify information for which they wish to claim confidentiality. Guidance for claims of confidentiality is set out in the AER's Confidentiality Guideline.²

In this Guidance Note we cover file naming and information markings that should be used when providing information submissions to the AER. Both elements are critical to ensure information that should not be made public is stored and managed appropriately by the AER.

Section 2 sets out how file names should be used to alert us to the fact that protected SOCI or confidential information is present in the file. Sections 3 to 6 sets out how information should be marked within a file, to identify it as protected SOCI or confidential information.

Appendix A shows both correct file naming and information marking relating to a data table, like many data tables received by the AER. (We note the need to visually identify protected SOCI and confidential information applies to all information, text based as well as data tables).

Correct identification of different types of information will give the AER confidence in how we protect, manage and share the information provided to us.

¹ See Federal Register of Legislation, [Security of Critical Infrastructure Act 2018](#)

² See [AER Confidentiality Guideline](#) - August 2017

2 File naming

We rely on file names to identify the types of information within the file, so we can correctly store and manage the information provided, right from the point of receipt. The suffix applied to the file name tells us what sort of information is present in the file, rather than what sort of information has been removed from the file.

Protected SOCI

Files containing information protected under the Security of Critical Infrastructure Act – also known as protected SOCI information, PSOCI or sometimes just SOCI information should be identified with the file name suffix “protected SOCI”.

We do not capitalise or use uppercase for the word ‘protected’ in our file naming. This helps to distinguish the protected SOCI information identifier from other information classifications used by the AER, in accordance with the Australian Government Protective Security Policy Framework.

Confidential

Files containing personal information and other confidential information, including information that is commercial in confidence should be identified with the file name suffix “CONFIDENTIAL”.

Public

The default classification of information is PUBLIC information. Files that do not contain protected SOCI information, personal information or other confidential information should be identified with the file name suffix “PUBLIC”. The AER may publish public information on our website or share it with other stakeholders on request. We will not seek permission from the relevant NSP to share information that has been categorised as PUBLIC information.

Table 1 shows each information type and its respective file name suffix.

Table 1 Information type and file name suffix

Information type	File name suffix
Information protected under the Security of Critical Infrastructure Act	protected SOCI
Confidential e.g., commercial in confidence e.g., personal	CONFIDENTIAL
Information protected under the Security of Critical Infrastructure Act AND Confidential	protected SOCI CONFIDENTIAL
Public	PUBLIC

3 Identification of public information

The default classification of information is PUBLIC information. If information is not identified protected SOCI information or confidential information we will treat the information as public information. That includes information that may be contained in a file that has other sections identified as protected SOCI or confidential (see sections 4 and 5).

For the example shown in figure 1, all information is deemed PUBLIC, and all information can be disclosed by the AER. No additional markings are required to identify public information.

Figure 1 - Public information example

ANNUAL REPORTING	
Gas Network	
2023-24	
E1. EXPENDITURE SUMMARY	
E1.1 - CAPEX	
E1.1.1 - REFERENCE SERVICES	
	EXPENDITURE (\$)
Connections	4,021,584
Mains replacement	5,970,699
Mains augmentation	270,290
Telemetry	31,328
Meter replacement	387,161
ICT	439,592
Capitalised network overheads	3,614,805
Capitalised corporate overheads	1,445,922
Other capex	2,504,176
Capital contributions <i>included in the above</i>	614,730
Total (<i>less capital contributions</i>)	18,685,557

Figure 2 - File name suffix - PUBLIC



4 Identification of confidential information

If a file contains confidential information, the confidential information must be identified within the file. That is, we expect confidential information to be marked (shaded/highlighted), so that it can clearly be distinguished from other public information.

- Confidential information must be shaded pink in RIN/AIO data files. The colour code is HEX code #FFCCCC.
- Confidential information must be shaded (NSP’s colour choice, often yellow) consistently in documents/PDFs.

Figure 3 – Confidential information example

ANNUAL REPORTING	
Gas Network	
2023-24	
E1. EXPENDITURE SUMMARY	
E1.1 - CAPEX	
E1.1.1 - REFERENCE SERVICES	
	EXPENDITURE (\$)
Connections	4,021,584
Mains replacement	5,970,699
Mains augmentation	270,290
Telemetry	31,328
Meter replacement	387,161
ICT	439,592
Capitalised network overheads	3,614,805
Capitalised corporate overheads	1,445,922
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Figure 4 – File name suffix – CONFIDENTIAL



4.1 Confidential information – redacted

Confidential information must be redacted from public files.

To create a public version of a confidential file, simply remove the confidential information (leaving the confidential colour markings) as shown in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5 – Confidential redacted (public) example

ANNUAL REPORTING	
Gas Network	
2023-24	
E1. EXPENDITURE SUMMARY	
E1.1 - CAPEX	
E1.1.1 - REFERENCE SERVICES	
	EXPENDITURE (\$)
Connections	4,021,584
Mains replacement	
Mains augmentation	270,290
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Meter replacement	
ICT	439,592
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Total (<i>less capital contributions</i>)	18,685,557

Figure 6 – File name suffix - PUBLIC



5 Identification of protected SOCI information

If a file contains protected SOCI information, the protected SOCI information must be identified within the file. That is, we expect protected SOCI information to be marked (shaded/highlighted), so that it can clearly be distinguished from confidential information and other public information.

- Protected SOCI information must be shaded blue in RIN/AIO data files. The colour code is HEX code #25C6FF.
- Protected SOCI information in other file types must also be shaded blue.

Figure 7 – Protected SOCI example

ANNUAL REPORTING	
Gas Network	
2023-24	
E1. EXPENDITURE SUMMARY	
E1.1 - CAPEX	
E1.1.1 - REFERENCE SERVICES	
	EXPENDITURE (\$)
Connections	4,021,584
Mains replacement	5,970,699
Mains augmentation	270,290
Telemetry	31,328
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ICT	439,592
Capitalised network overheads	3,614,805
Capitalised corporate overheads	1,445,922
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Figure 8 – File name suffix – protected SOCI



5.1 Protected SOCI information – redacted

Protected SOCI information must be redacted from public files.

To create a public version of this file, simply remove the protected SOCI information (leaving the blue colour markings) as shown in Figure 9 below.

Figure 9 – Protected SOCI redacted (public) example

ANNUAL REPORTING	
Gas Network	
2023-24	
E1. EXPENDITURE SUMMARY	
E1.1 - CAPEX	
E1.1.1 - REFERENCE SERVICES	
	EXPENDITURE (\$)
Connections	4,021,584
Mains replacement	5,970,699
Mains augmentation	270,290
Telemetry	
Meter replacement	387,161
ICT	
Capitalised network overheads	3,614,805
Capitalised corporate overheads	1,445,922
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Figure 10 – File name suffix - PUBLIC



6 Identification of protected SOCI and confidential information

If a file contains protected SOCI information and confidential information, both the protected SOCI information and the confidential information must be identified within the file. That is, we expect protected SOCI information to be marked and the confidential information to be separately marked, so each type of information can clearly be distinguished from public information, and confidential/protected SOCI information as appropriate.

- Protected SOCI information must be shaded blue in RIN/AIO data files. The colour code is HEX code #25C6FF.
- Confidential information must be shaded pink in RIN/AIO data files. The colour code is HEX code #FFCCCC.
- Protected SOCI information in other file types must also be shaded blue.
- Confidential information must be shaded (NSP’s colour choice) consistently in documents/PDFs.

Figure 11 – Protected SOCI and confidential example

ANNUAL REPORTING	
Gas Network	
2023-24	
E1. EXPENDITURE SUMMARY	
E1.1 - CAPEX	
E1.1.1 - REFERENCE SERVICES	
	EXPENDITURE (\$)
Connections	4,021,584
Mains replacement	5,970,699
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Figure 12 – File name suffix – protected SOCI CONFIDENTIAL



6.1 Protected SOCI information – redacted

Protected SOCI information must be redacted from confidential files

To create a confidential version of this file, simply remove the protected SOCI information (leaving the blue colour markings) as shown in Figure 13 below.

Figure 13 – Protected SOCI redacted (confidential) example

ANNUAL REPORTING	
Gas Network	
2023-24	
E1. EXPENDITURE SUMMARY	
E1.1 - CAPEX	
E1.1.1 - REFERENCE SERVICES	
	EXPENDITURE (\$)
Connections	4,021,584
Mains replacement	5,970,699
Mains augmentation	270,290
Telemetry	
Meter replacement	387,161
ICT	
Capitalised network overheads	3,614,805
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Figure 14 – File name suffix – CONFIDENTIAL



6.2 Protected SOCI and confidential - redacted

Both protected SOCI information and confidential information must be redacted from public files.

To create a public version of this file, both the protected SOCI information and the confidential information is removed (leaving the blue and pink colour markings) as shown in Figure 15, below.

Figure 15 – Protected SOCI redacted and confidential redacted (public) example

ANNUAL REPORTING	
Gas Network	
2023-24	
E1. EXPENDITURE SUMMARY	
E1.1 - CAPEX	
E1.1.1 - REFERENCE SERVICES	
	EXPENDITURE (\$)
Connections	4,021,584
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Figure 16 – File name suffix - PUBLIC



Appendix A – Visual guide

Public

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Confidential >> Public

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SOCI protected >> Public

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SOCI protected & Confidential >> Confidential >> Public

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Glossary

Term	Definition
AER	Australian Energy Regulator
NSP	Network Service Provider
RIN	Regulatory Information Notice
PSOCI	Protected SOCI
SOCI	Security of Critical Infrastructure Act 2018
