

Submission Form for Comments and Feedback

Draft Guideline for Identification of significant effects on the environment

Submissions close: Monday 15 August 2016, 5pm

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Your comments will be publicly available.

Mark the box here if you do not want your comments to be made publicly available.

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Section	Comment
3.2	When making a decision about whether an action is likely to have a significant effect on the environment, as an additional matter under Section 3.2, the NT EPA should consider what is currently known about the environment (i.e. quality and quantity of baseline environmental data) that is likely to be impacted. In the case where either no or limited environmental baseline data exists within the environmental footprint of a development proposal, an effort should be made to obtain the relevant data prior to the decision being made, to allow the NT EPA to make an informed decision.

Please complete the form and send it via one of the following by no later than Monday 15 August 5pm:

Email: NTEPA.Consult@nt.gov.au

Post: NT EPA, GPO Box 3675, Darwin NT, 0801

Privacy: Your personal information will be used for the purpose of collecting and collating comments received on the Issues Paper. The NT EPA is subject to the *Information Act* and its Regulations. Information will not be disclosed to a third party, unless required by law or otherwise stated.

General comments

Under the EA Act definition of the term ‘Environment’ includes the “economic, cultural and social” aspects of the environment. Given that Aboriginal people residing outside of the major population centres in the Northern Territory (NT) are often living within the environmental/ geographic footprint of a development proposal, the NT EPA should consider how it engages with these people to seek their opinions with regard to the potential environmental impacts of such development proposals. To further strengthen its public consultation processes, the NT EPA should define and implement a community consultation process that is culturally and socially appropriate for the specific circumstances of each development proposal.

The NLC suggests that people living in remote regions would be better engaged if the NT EPA incorporated a community-based consultation mechanism into its general public feedback process, rather than relying on the current highly selective system of public comment via the internet. This current internet-based approach is unlikely to prove effective in remote regions of the NT where computer literacy and English language skills are likely to be well below national average standards. Consultation strategies, techniques and timeframes for consulting with Aboriginal people and other members of the general public residing in remote areas with the potential to be impacted by a development proposal should also consider the predominant cultural and social aspects of these areas. In such cases more time may be required to consult appropriately with people living remotely, compare to urban-based members of the public, and allow sufficient time for informed feedback to be provided to the NT EPA.

The true “significance” of an effect on an area where a non-European (i.e. in this case Aboriginal) culture dominates, or is significant, must be measured in terms that are meaningful and understood by that culture (i.e. in this case Aboriginal). This requires a thorough understanding of the cultural and physical aspects of the environment and how it is managed and used from both European and Aboriginal perspectives – which can only be obtained through inclusion of traditional forms of ecological and cultural knowledge throughout the entire process. Northern Territory environmental management assessment processes and legislation are sadly lacking in the consideration of traditional knowledge and how it can be applied. Until the Aboriginal viewpoint is included at all stages of the assessment process – including the definition of what is “significant”, a full environmental assessment that is acceptable to the whole community cannot be obtained.