

## **ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES**

**When a Notice of Intent is not required for land clearing proposals submitted under the *Pastoral Land Act***

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose

The objective of this guideline is to assist proponents of pastoral land clearing projects and the Pastoral Land Board in determining when development proposals submitted under the *Pastoral Land Act* **will not** require referral for assessment under the *Environmental Assessment Act* (EA Act). The aim is to provide greater clarity and certainty around the environmental assessment process, and to streamline the roles and responsibilities of government and proponents. Only some pastoral land clearing projects require environmental impact assessment.

These Guidelines are provided in keeping with the Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority's (NT EPA) obligations under the *Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority Act* to:

- encourage community involvement and engagement;
- ensure transparent processes and provide certainty to business; and
- make guidelines about its administrative practices and procedures.

## 1.2 Background

### 1.2.1 Environmental Impact Assessment

The Northern Territory's *Environmental Assessment Act* and *Environmental Assessment Administrative Procedures* form the basis of the environmental assessment process and are administered by the NT Environment Protection Authority.

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a predictive tool for identifying and characterising the environmental impacts and risks associated with a proposed development. EIA is ideally applied at the early planning and design stages to increase the likelihood of both ecologically sustainable development and the protection of environmental values. The Environmental Impact Assessment Process (<https://ntepa.nt.gov.au/environmental-assessments/guide-to-the-eia-process-in-the-northern-territory>) provides the NT EPA with the information needed to assist consideration of and decisions on matters that could significantly affect the environment. It enables environmental issues to be considered in a balanced way with other aspects involved in determining the acceptability of a proposal and it ensures that unnecessary and unacceptable harm to the environment can be avoided.

For these reasons it is important that any potential environmental impacts and constraints are identified early in the planning and design of any major project. Early identification ensures that environmental assessment is integrated with engineering and economic feasibility studies in the project formulation so as to produce the best and most appropriate project design, including monitoring and management options.

If a project requires assessment under the EA Act, it is undertaken in a systematic and transparent manner with opportunities for public review and input. The proponent is required to prepare and submit documentation describing the proposal, the risks and potential environmental impacts and how the risks would be controlled and impacts managed. Concerns raised by Government and the public during the assessment need to be addressed by the proponent.

### 1.2.2 Notice of Intent

The first step in the Northern Territory's EIA process is submission of a Notice of Intent (NOI) to the NT EPA. This guideline provides advice on when preparation and submission of a NOI is not required.

## 2 Legislative Requirements

EIA may involve assessments and approvals in relation to matters regulated under a range of Northern Territory and Commonwealth legislation. Relevant legislation includes that listed below. The list is indicative of matters that may require assessment. It is not exhaustive.

Proponents and assessors should carefully review projects to determine legislated requirements relevant to particular projects.

The legislation listed has been used in developing this guideline.

### 2.1 Northern Territory Legislation

#### 2.1.1 Culture & Heritage

- *Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act*
- *Heritage Act*

#### 2.1.2 Land Use

- *Planning Act*
- *Aboriginal Land Act*
- *Crown Lands Act*
- *Soil Conservation and Land Utilisation Act*
- *Bushfires Act*
- *Pastoral Land Act*

#### 2.1.3 Industry

- *Fisheries Act*

#### 2.1.4 Water Quality & Biodiversity Conservation

- *Water Act*
- *Biological Control Act*
- *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*
- *Fisheries Act*
- *Weeds Management Act 2001*
- *Public and Environmental Health Act*

#### 2.1.5 Air Quality, Noise and Waste Management

- *Waste Management and Pollution Control Act*
- *Public and Environmental Health Act*

### 2.1.6 Safety and Navigational

- *Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act*

## 2.2 Commonwealth Legislation

Some proposals may need consideration under Commonwealth legislation. Those Acts include the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, *Native Title Act 1993*, and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

### 2.2.1 Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act

The Commonwealth's EPBC Act provides protection for matters of national environmental significance (NES). The Commonwealth agency determines whether a proposal could potentially affect a NES matter and whether it requires assessment and approval under the EPBC Act. The NES matters are:

- World Heritage properties;
- National Heritage places;
- Ramsar wetlands of international importance;
- Nationally threatened animal and plant species and ecological communities;
- Internationally protected migratory species;
- Commonwealth marine areas;
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park;
- Nuclear actions (including uranium mines); and
- a water resource, in relation to coal seam gas development and large coal mining development.

Referral of a proposed action to the Australian Government is outside the jurisdiction of the NT EPA, and remains the responsibility of the proponent.

The EPBC Act webpage has a search tool that helps determine whether NES matters occur in the area of proposed activity. To generate a map and environmental report on the area refer to:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/erin/ert/epbc/index.html>.

## 3 Limitations

This guideline is:

- confined to generic matters relating to when a NOI is not required and does not address more proposal-specific issues that may be of significance;
- not an instrument for predicting outcomes of deliberations by the NT EPA;
- intended to provide a more certain and consistent approach to assessments;
- intended to apply to proposals prior to the proponent submitting the proposal NOI to NT EPA for environmental assessment; and
- a guide only. Proponents are responsible for understanding and complying with all laws that relate to the proposed activity.

*The Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority (NT EPA) has prepared this document in good faith, exercising all due care and attention, but no representation or warranty, express or implied, is made as to the relevance, completeness or fitness for purpose of this document in respect of any particular user's circumstances. Users of this*

*document should satisfy themselves concerning its application to their situation and, where necessary, seek expert advice.*

### 4 When to refer a proposal

Land clearing proposals submitted under the *Pastoral Land Act* may require assessment under the EA Act if they are likely to have a significant effect on the environment. Where there is the potential for significant risks to the environment a referral or NOI for assessment under the EA Act is required before approval can be granted under the *Pastoral Land Act*. A NOI may be directly provided to the NT EPA by a land clearing proponent. Alternatively, a proposal can be referred to the NT EPA for assessment on behalf of a proponent, by the Pastoral Land Board.

Land clearing proposals **will not** require referral under the EA Act providing certain criteria have been met, as outlined below.

### 5 When not to refer a proposal

Land clearing applications made under the *Pastoral Land Act* **will not** generally require referral and assessment under the EA Act when all criteria, where applicable, in Attachment A **are fulfilled** i.e. the answer to all questions is either “YES” or “N/A”. Proposals **will** require a NOI when any of the criteria **are not** fulfilled i.e. the answer to one or more questions is “NO”. Advice can be sought from the NT EPA in cases of uncertainty. Alternatively a proposal could be submitted to the Pastoral Land Board for determination as to whether a proposal would be referred to the NT EPA for consideration.

The NT EPA retains the right to call in proposals for assessment under the EA Act if relevant steps cannot or are unlikely to be taken to minimise and/or mitigate the environmental effects of land clearing.

Specific conditions or notations may need to be listed on permits issued under the *Pastoral Land Act*, to ensure matters listed in Attachment A, are adequately dealt with by proponents.

### 6 Further information

NT Environment Protection Authority

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ATTACHMENT A

Assessment Criterion	Response (Yes, No, N/A)
<p>The proposed action is <b>unlikely</b> to have potential to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cause pollution of freshwater/marine waterways, groundwater, soils and/or air;</li> <li>• cause detrimental impacts on aquatic fauna consumed or used for food consumption;</li> <li>• significantly obstruct or alter existing waterways or groundwater flows; and/or</li> <li>• involve significant ground or surface water extraction.</li> </ul>	
<p>Proposed stormwater management <b>is compliant</b> and <b>sufficient</b> to meet with Department of Land Resources Management (DLRM) requirements where required by the Pastoral Land Board.</p>	
<p>Site suitability assessments <b>have shown</b> that significant soil erosion, soil salinity, flooding or disturbance of acid sulphate soils <b>is unlikely</b>.</p>	
<p>An Erosion and Sediment Control Plan <b>has been</b> prepared if and as required by the Pastoral Land Board.</p>	
<p>Noise, Dust and/or Emissions to Air Management Plans, where required, <b>have been</b> prepared to Pastoral Land Board satisfaction.</p>	
<p>Flora and fauna assessments including review of proximity to Sites of Conservation Significance, to the satisfaction of the Pastoral Land Board, indicate <b>that no</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• threatened species listed under the <i>Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act</i>; or</li> <li>• habitat of potential significance to the above;</li> </ul> <p>are within, or in proximity to, the proposed development site; or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there <b>is little</b> potential for significant impact to biodiversity and a Biodiversity Management Plan <b>provides for</b> the adequate protection or relocation of threatened flora or fauna and is endorsed by the DLRM.</li> </ul>	
<p>The proposed land clearing area <b>is not</b> located within, or in close proximity to, a National Park, Conservation Reserve or Marine Park or Reserve.</p>	
<p>Land clearing <b>will be</b> managed in accordance with the Pastoral Land Clearing Guidelines, to the satisfaction of the Pastoral Land Board.</p>	
<p>A Weed Management Plan <b>has been</b> prepared consistent with DLRM guidelines and will be implemented to the satisfaction of the Pastoral Land Board.</p>	

## Environmental Assessment Guidelines – Pastoral Land

<p>An Authority Certificate application <b>has been</b> submitted to the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority and once issued, the Certificate conditions <b>will be</b> complied with. Authority Certificate Requests can be made from the form on the AAPA website: <a href="http://www.aapant.org.au">www.aapant.org.au</a>.</p>	
<p>A cultural heritage survey <b>has been</b> done and any identified heritage values <b>will be</b> managed, in consultation with the Heritage Branch of the DLPE and to the satisfaction of the Pastoral Land Board.</p>	
<p>Work health and safety assessments <b>have been</b> done and any identified issues <b>will be</b> addressed, in consultation with NT WorkSafe and to the satisfaction of the Pastoral Land Board.</p>	
<p>The requirement to refer the proposed action under the EPBC Act has been considered, and it <b>has been</b> determined that a referral is <b>not</b> required or the proposal has been referred and the Australian Government Minister <b>has</b> determined that further assessment is <b>not</b> required (i.e.: not a “controlled action”).</p>	
<p>There <b>is</b> little potential for the proposed action to cause significant social or economic impacts, or significant impacts on surrounding land users.</p>	