

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT GUIDELINES**

**Onshore petroleum exploration or production proposals  
submitted under the *Petroleum Act***

April 2013  
Version 1.2

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose

The objective of these guidelines is to assist proponents of onshore petroleum exploration or production projects and the Department of Mines and Energy in determining when proposals submitted under the *Petroleum Act* will not require referral and 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 petroleum exploration or production 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 (<http://www.ntepa.nt.gov.au/environmental-assessments/eiaguide>) 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 formal EIA, 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. These guidelines provide 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 these Guidelines.

### 2.1 Northern Territory Legislation

#### 2.1.1 Cultural & 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*
- *Petroleum (Submerged Lands) Act*
- *Petroleum Act*
- *Energy Pipelines Act*
- *Mining Management Act*

#### 2.1.4 Water Quality & Biodiversity Conservation

- *Water Act*
- *Biological Control Act*
- *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act*
- *Fisheries Act*
- *Marine Pollution Act*

- *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*
- *Marine Pollution Act*

#### 2.1.6 Safety and Navigational

- *Marine Act*
- *Darwin Port Corporation Act*
- *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*, *Environment Protection (Sea Dumping) Act 1981*, *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) and *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976*.

#### 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; and
- Nuclear actions (including uranium mines).

The EPBC Act webpage has a search tool that helps determine whether NES matters occur in the area of proposed dredging 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 Guidance 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;
- designed to promote a more certain and consistent approach to assessments;

- intended to apply to proposals prior to the proponent submitting the proposal 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

Onshore petroleum exploration and production applications submitted under the *Petroleum 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 activity can be approved under the *Petroleum Act*. A NOI may be directly provided to the NT EPA by a proponent. Alternatively, a project can be referred by the Department of Mines and Energy to the NT EPA for assessment on behalf of a proponent,

Petroleum exploration and production 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

Onshore petroleum exploration and production applications made under the *Petroleum Act* will not generally require referral and assessment under the EA Act when all criteria, where applicable, in Attachment A are fulfilled. Proposals will require a NOI when any of the criteria are not fulfilled. Advice can be sought from the NT EPA in cases of uncertainty.

The NT EPA retains the right to call in projects 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 petroleum exploration and production activities.

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

### 6 Further information

NT Environment Protection Authority

GPO Box 3675

Darwin NT 0801

Tel 08 8924 4218

Fax 08 8924 4053

Email [eia.ntepa@nt.gov.au](mailto:eia.ntepa@nt.gov.au)

Web [www.ntepa.nt.gov.au](http://www.ntepa.nt.gov.au)

ATTACHMENT A

Assessment Criterion	Response (Yes, No, N/A)
<p>The proposed development is unlikely 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 as food;</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 is compliant with Department of Land Resources Management’s requirements and will be implemented to the satisfaction of the DME.</p>	
<p>As required an Erosion and Sediment Control Plan has been prepared consistent with Department of Land Resource Management (DLRM) guidelines, and will be implemented to the satisfaction of the DME.</p>	
<p>Waste management will be conducted in accordance with the <i>Waste Management and Pollution Control Act</i> and to the satisfaction of DME.</p>	
<p>Noise and/or Dust Management Plans will be prepared as required by the DME.</p>	
<p>Flora and fauna assessments, to the satisfaction of the DME, indicate that no:</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>• a Biodiversity Management Plan provides for the adequate protection or relocation of threatened flora or fauna and is endorsed by the DLRM.</li> </ul>	
<p>The proposed development site is not located within, or in close proximity to, a National Park, Conservation Reserve, Marine Park or Reserve, or Site of Conservation Significance.</p>	
<p>Land clearing will be avoided and where essential minimised to the greatest possible extent. Where essential it will be managed in accordance with the NT Land Clearing Guidelines, to the satisfaction of DME.</p>	
<p>A Weed Management Plan has been prepared consistent with DLRM guidelines and will be implemented to the satisfaction of the DME.</p>	
<p>An Authority Certificate application has been submitted to the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority.</p>	
<p>A cultural heritage survey has been done and any identified heritage values will be managed, in consultation with the Heritage Branch of the DLPE and to the</p>	

satisfaction of the DME.	
Environmental health assessments (refer Department of Health – Fact Sheet 700: Requirements for Mining and Construction Projects) have been done and any identified issues will be addressed, in consultation with the Department of Health and to the satisfaction of the DME.	
Work health and safety assessments have been done and any identified issues will be addressed, in consultation with NT WorkSafe and to the satisfaction of the DME.	
There is no potential for significant impacts on infrastructure or traffic, or these impacts are to be mitigated to the satisfaction of responsible agencies.	
There will be no potential for significant adverse social or economic impacts on communities or other land uses surrounding the proposed activity site or an Economic and Social Impact Management Plan has/is being prepared that will mitigate negative impacts to DME's satisfaction.	
The proposed development is unlikely to have a significant impact on matters of national environmental significance protected under the Australian Government's <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> , based on application of the "Significant Impact Guidelines 1.1 – Matters of National Environmental Significance".	

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