

Preparing a supplementary environmental report (SER)

**Environmental impact assessment
Guidance for proponents**

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Further information

Further information and guidance on the environmental impact assessment process is available on the NT EPA website at: www.ntepa.nt.gov.au

If you require assistance in applying this guidance to your circumstances or you are unsure whether a referral is required for your proposal, please contact the Environment Division of the Department of Environment, Parks and Water Security (DEPWS). Appointments with relevant staff can be made through the contacts below:

Email: eia.ntepa@nt.gov.au
 Tel: 08 8924 4218

Contents

1. Introduction	4
1.1. Overview.....	4
1.2. Purpose of the guidance	5
2. When an SER is required	5
3. The SER process	6
3.1. Key steps.....	6
3.2. Preparing the SER.....	6
3.3. Public consultation on the SER.....	7
3.4. Additional information.....	7
3.5. NT EPA assessment report.....	7
3.6. Environmental approval/refusal.....	8
3.7. Submitting SER documents	8
4. Matters to be addressed in the SER and suggested structure	8
Appendix 1 – SER process flow chart	17

1. Introduction

1.1. Overview

The Northern Territory Environment Protection Authority (NT EPA) is responsible for assessing the potential significant impacts¹ of proposed actions and strategic proposals (proposals) on the environment in accordance with the Environment Protection Act 2019 (EP Act) and the Environment Protection Regulations 2020 (EP Regulations).

A supplementary environmental report (SER) is a publicly available document prepared by the proponent to respond to submissions received on the referral information and provide any additional information required by the NT EPA. The SER is also used to inform decisions by statutory decision-makers about authorisation of the proposal.

This guidance document is part of a range of guidance prepared by the NT EPA to describe the environmental impact assessment process to all stakeholders. This document should be read in conjunction with other NT EPA guidance documents that provide detail on the environmental impact assessment process, as shown in Figure 1.

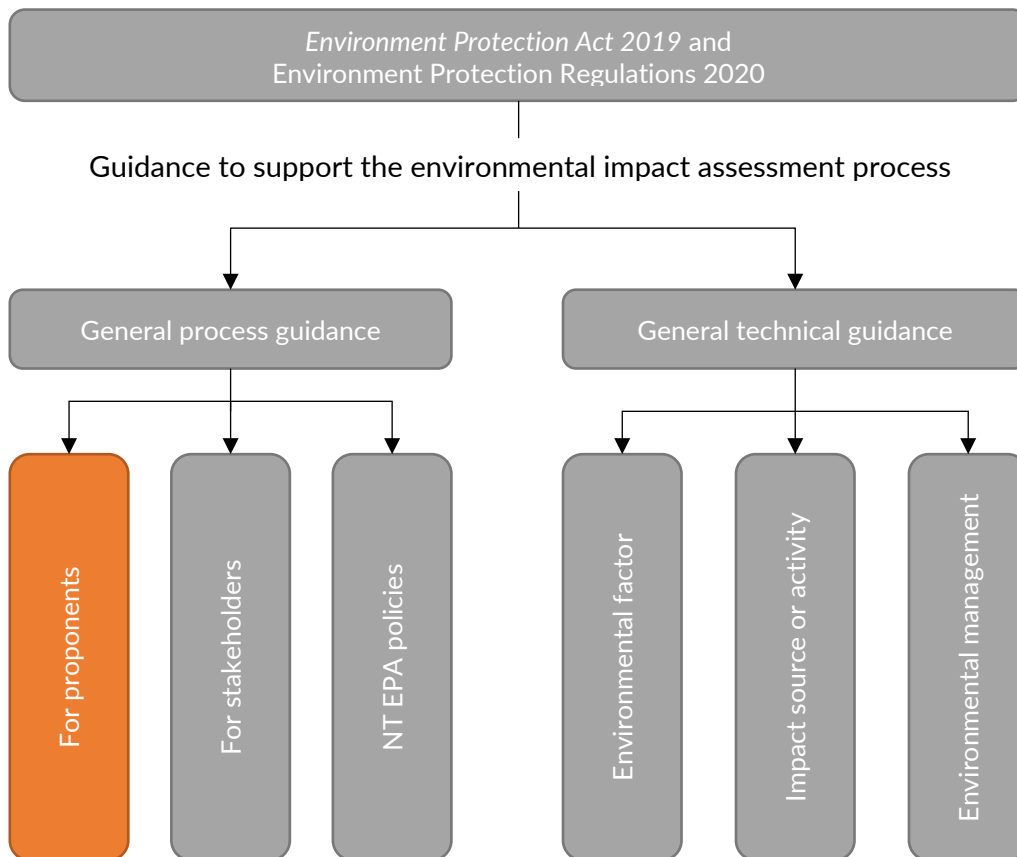


Figure 1 Environmental impact assessment guidance framework

¹ A significant impact of an action is an impact of major consequence having regard to: (a) the context and intensity of the impact; and (b) the sensitivity, value and quality of the environment impacted on and the duration, magnitude and geographic extent of the impact. Refer to section 11 of the EP Act.

1.2. Purpose of the guidance

This document provides guidance to proponents about the SER method of environmental impact assessment, including information about:

- Process:
 - when an SER is required
 - describing the SER assessment process
 - submitting an SER to the NT EPA
- Information requirements and structure:
 - promoting an SER structure that assists the reader of the SER to clearly understand how the issues raised in submissions have been addressed and how any additional information requirements have been resolved
 - promoting high quality content in the SER, to produce an SER that focusses on the relevant matters
 - guiding proponents and their consultants about the general requirements and matters to be addressed in the SER to allow the NT EPA to complete its assessment, and for the Minister for Environment (Minister) to decide whether to grant, or refuse to grant, an environmental approval.

This document is part of a series of guidance that communicates the various components and stages of the environmental impact assessment process. For more general information about environmental impact assessment in the NT, please refer to the [Guide to Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Approval in the Northern Territory](#) and the [environmental impact assessment process flow chart](#).

2. When an SER is required

After a proponent [refers a proposal to the NT EPA](#) and it has been accepted for consideration and made available for public comment, the NT EPA (or Minister for the Environment in the case of a strategic proposal) must decide whether the proposal will:

- not have a significant impact on the environment and environmental impact assessment is not required; or
- have a significant impact on the environment and environmental impact assessment is required.

When a decision is made² that environmental impact assessment is required for a proposal, one of four methods of environmental impact assessment is selected, as listed in EP regulation 5:

- Assessment by referral information (not discussed in this guidance)³

² for an accepted referral for standard assessment, the decision-maker is the NT EPA; for an accepted referral for strategic assessment, the decision-maker is the Minister for Environment

³ Refer to NT EPA guidance - [Referring a proposal to the NT EPA](#)

- **Assessment by supplementary environmental report (SER) (the subject of this guidance)**
- Assessment by environmental impact statement (EIS) (not discussed in this guidance)⁴
- Assessment by inquiry (not discussed in this guidance).

Under the EP Act, an SER is required when the NT EPA has decided that the method of environmental impact assessment is Assessment by SER. This method may be selected if the decision-maker is satisfied that the proposal has the potential to have a significant impact on the environment, however the scale, extent or complexity of potential significant environmental impacts are not so great that assessment by an EIS process is required.

Proponents should refer to the [NT EPA's guidance on referring proposals](#) for detail about how the NT EPA determines 'significant impact'.

The SER has an important role in the environmental impact assessment process of demonstrating that the proponent has responded to the submissions received on the referral information; and, if applicable, addressed any additional information requirements as directed by the NT EPA.

3. The SER process

3.1. Key steps

If the environmental impact assessment method selected is *Assessment by SER*, the proponent must prepare an SER and submit it to the NT EPA, to respond to the submissions received on the referral about the potentially significant environmental impacts of the proposed action, and the measures proposed by the proponent to avoid, mitigate and/or offset those impacts. Any additional information requirements requested by the NT EPA must also be addressed.

The process for assessment by SER (Part 5 Division 5 of the EP Regulations) is outlined in Figure 2 and detailed in Appendix 2.

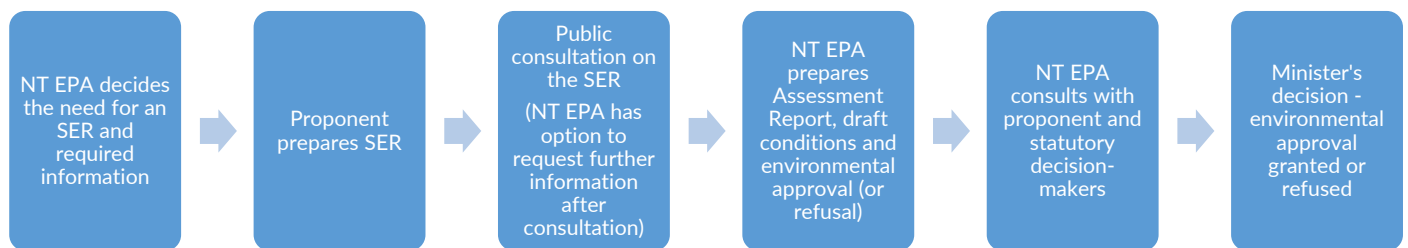


Figure 2: Key steps in the Supplementary Environmental Report process

3.2. Preparing the SER

The SER must address the submissions received from government authorities and the public in relation to the referral information and, if applicable, any other additional information the NT EPA directs the

⁴ Refer to NT EPA guidance – [Preparing an environmental impact statement](#)

proponent to include⁵. Unlike an EIS process, an SER process does not include the development of terms of reference.

It is the responsibility of the proponent to ensure the SER addresses all the matters identified in the submissions and any direction given, so that the NT EPA has adequate information to complete its assessment. Proponents are expected to carefully consider the issues raised in submissions and where appropriate, adapt the proposal, the performance criteria or mitigation measures to address the issues raised.

The level of detail provided in the SER should be commensurate with the level of significance of the potential impacts that are being assessed. Once the SER has been submitted to the NT EPA, it is to be published by the proponent in the manner determined by the NT EPA.

3.3. Public consultation on the SER

The NT EPA will publish a notice of the SER on its webpage, and invite public submissions on the SER within a 25 business day consultation period after the notice is published. The NT EPA may also require the proponent to publish a notice about the public consultation of the SER in other media such as local newspapers and/or online. The NT EPA will invite government authorities to make a submission to the NT EPA on the SER during the public consultation period⁶.

3.4. Additional information

If the NT EPA considers that additional information is necessary to facilitate its consideration of the SER it may, in accordance with EP regulation 124, direct the proponent to provide additional information to that provided in the SER. The NT EPA must make this request within 20 business days after the end of the SER public submission period. Where the NT EPA directs the proponent to provide additional information to the SER, the NT EPA will publish the direction, and any information received in response to it.

The NT EPA may invite interested persons, specified persons and government authorities to make a submission on additional information to an SER, within a specified submission period that does not exceed 15 business days. If the NT EPA invites submissions on the additional information, the required period for the NT EPA to prepare an assessment report ceases to run until the end of the submission period. If submissions are received, the NT EPA may invite the proponent to provide a response to the submissions within a specified period, during which time the required period for the NT EPA to provide the assessment report to the Minister ceases to run.⁷

3.5. NT EPA assessment report

The NT EPA must provide an assessment report (and a draft environmental approval or draft statement of unacceptable impact) to the Minister within 40 business days after the end of the submission period or the outcome of any NT EPA direction to provide additional information in relation to the SER as discussed above.⁸

⁵ Refer to EP Regulation 119

⁶ Refer to [EP Regulations 122](#) (Public consultation) and [123](#) (Consultation with government authorities), p. 49.

⁷ Refer to [EP Regulations 124](#) (Additional information in relation to a supplementary environmental report) p. 49.

⁸ Refer to [EP Regulation 161](#) (Period for providing assessment report), p. 61.

3.6. Environmental approval/refusal

The decision to grant, or refuse to grant, an environmental approval is made by the Minister, informed by advice from the NT EPA. The purpose of the environmental approval is to manage the potentially significant environmental impacts of an action⁹. Further information on the environmental approval can be accessed on the [DEPWS website](#).

3.7. Submitting SER documents

The proponent must submit the SER and any associated documents within the period specified by the NT EPA. The SER may be submitted to the NT EPA:

- in person: Level 1, Arnhemica House, 16 Parap Road, Parap
- by email: eia.ntepa@nt.gov.au (if the email is less than 25 MB)
- by electronic file upload: contact staff of the Environment Division of DEPWS for more information
- by post: NT EPA, GPO Box 3675 Darwin NT 0801.

Individual document files must be less than 20 MB, optimised for web use, and unsecured / not password protected to allow for web upload. Electronic copies (pdf and word format) must be provided both as a single file of the entire document and separate files of the document i.e. the main document and separate appendices.

A proponent may apply to have information kept confidential and not published. An application must be submitted in an approved form (in accordance with sections 281 to 283 of the EP Act and EP Regulation 271). Please contact the NT EPA for advice.

The application will be considered by the NT EPA and/or Minister. If granted, the confidential information will not be made public, however it will be provided to government authorities and the NT EPA and/or Minister for consideration. The proponent will also be required to submit a complete SER, with the confidential information already removed, so it is fit for publication on the NT EPA website.

4. Matters to be addressed in the SER and suggested structure

The SER comprises three main parts as outlined below:

- Executive summary - a stand-alone document that includes a brief outline of the proposal and the SER, allowing the reader to obtain a clear understanding of the proposal, its potential environmental implications and management objectives
- Main body of the report - provide a comprehensive response to the submissions on the accepted referral and the requirements of any direction from the NT EPA, and address all of the information requirements outlined in this guidance
- Appendices - where required, include detailed technical information, studies or investigations (including data) necessary to support the main text. If supporting documents recommend further

⁹ Refer to Part 5 of the EP Act (Environmental approvals), p. 32.

work be undertaken, address those recommendations. Clarify any inconsistencies with the supporting documents, e.g. changes in the proposal scope since studies were undertaken.

A declaration form (available from the NT EPA website) must be completed and submitted with the SER.

Table 1 details the information requirements for an SER. This table also provides an example of the preferred order for the table of contents for the development of an SER.

Table 1: Matters to be addressed in the SER and suggested item structure

Item	Matters to be addressed in the SER
<i>Table of contents</i>	Include a clear table of contents (TOC) in the SER and any associated additional information documents to allow the reader to easily find information. Electronic pdf document files should have the TOC bookmarked to allow for ease of navigation. The TOC headings will vary for each type of document and for individual proposals.
<i>Executive summary</i>	Include a brief outline of the proposal and the SER in the executive summary to allow the reader to obtain a clear understanding of the proposal, the potential significant environmental impacts and the proposed measures to avoid, mitigate and/or offset those impacts; as well as the key information requirements that the SER addresses in response to the submissions received and any direction given. Provide a summary of the benefits of the proposal, alternatives to the proposal, outcomes of consultation and the referral process, including matters outlined in any direction given, and responses to the submissions received.
<i>Introduction</i>	Include a brief introduction in the SER which focuses on introducing the subject and background of the SER, and avoids repeating information from the introduction in the referral. Include a table in the introduction, to demonstrate how the matters raised in submissions; and, if applicable, the matters included in any NT EPA direction to provide additional information, have been addressed, with cross-referencing to the relevant section of the SER or the appendices. It may be appropriate to attach a copy of the submissions, and any additional information requirements, with more detailed cross referencing, as an appendix.
<i>Proposal description</i>	A clear description of the proposal and the full scope of works for which approval is being sought will have already been included in the referral information. Therefore, the SER proposal description should be limited in scope to clearly identify any minor amendments, variations or modifications to the proposal since the referral information was submitted. The SER proposal description should not repeat the information included in the referral proposal description, and should instead clearly identify any changes, including changes made in response to addressing submissions. This includes the key components table. If changes have been made to the table submitted in the referral documentation, include an amended table with any changes clearly shown (e.g. in tracked changes or a separate column) to identify the addition or removal of information.

Item	Matters to be addressed in the SER
	Where there is uncertainty in the detailed design, footprint, capacity or life of the proposal, clearly explain the approach to resolving uncertainty and provide the maximum extent or range for each parameter.
<i>Alternatives</i>	The consideration of alternatives should have already been included in the referral for the proposal; therefore, the consideration of alternatives in the SER should be limited only to matters raised in submissions or in a direction to provide additional information in the SER from the NT EPA.
<i>Stakeholder engagement</i>	<p>Provide details and outcomes of any stakeholder engagement and consultation undertaken by the proponent since the referral was submitted to the NT EPA, to meet the requirements of section 43 of the EP Act. Stakeholder consultation information from the referral does not need to be repeated in the SER.</p> <p>Stakeholder engagement information in the SER should be limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engagement conducted since submission of the referral • engagement conducted in response to submissions received on the referral, including engagement with persons or entities who have made the submissions, and any engagement undertaken following any direction given to include additional information in the SER. <p>Include specific details of consultation with stakeholders. Generic discussions with decision making authorities do not need to be included. Outline future engagement activities intended to be undertaken throughout the assessment process and after the assessment is completed, including during construction and operation of the proposal. Further information can be found in the NT EPA guidance for proponents on Stakeholder Engagement and Consultation.</p>
<i>Responding to submissions</i>	<p>The SER must respond to public and government authority submissions received in relation to the referral information. A meaningful and well-structured response to submissions received in relation to the referral information is an important part of the SER.</p> <p>Proponents are expected to carefully consider the issues raised in submissions and where appropriate, adapt the proposal, the performance criteria or mitigation measures to address the issues raised.</p> <p>The proponent's responses to the submissions are considered by the NT EPA during its assessment of the proposal, and by the Minister (or delegate) when deciding whether to approve or refuse a proposal.</p> <p>Include the following information in response to submissions, where relevant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analysis and categorisation of the submissions received, organised by environmental factor • a summary table identifying the stakeholder, issues raised in submissions, and the proponent's response to the submissions including actions taken to address those issues such as engagement and any further environmental assessment, or an explanation as to why no action was required/taken

Item	Matters to be addressed in the SER
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a description of any changes to the proposal as a result of submissions received, including updated plans, figures and images • Where the proponent does not adopt the recommendations included in submissions, it should provide a clear explanation of the reasons why those recommendations have not been adopted. Further information can be found in the guidance for stakeholders: Making a public submission during the environmental impact assessment process
<i>Matters of national environmental significance</i>	<p>If the proposal has been determined to be a controlled action under the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> (EPBC Act) and is being assessed by the NT EPA in accordance with a Bilateral Agreement (section 45 of EPBC Act) or an Accredited Process (section 87 of EPBC Act), the Australian Government requires matters of national environmental significance (MNES) to be addressed. Include the following details:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a list of the controlled action provisions and the relevant policy and guidance for the MNES • a summary of the existing environmental value(s) that relate to the MNES • a summary of the potential impacts (direct, indirect and cumulative) on the MNES and provide relevant tables and maps • a summary of the assessment on the relevant environmental factor/s to determine the level of significance of the impact on the MNES • how the mitigation hierarchy has been applied • a summary of any proposed mitigation measures • a summary of whether offsets are required in relation to the MNES and if so, provide details of the proposed offset and how the offset addressed the Australian Government Environmental Offset Policy. <p>Significant impact guidelines and an environmental assessment process flow chart are available on the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE) website to assist proponents to understand the assessment process and determine whether an action is likely to have a significant impact on a matter protected under the EPBC Act.</p>
<i>Environmental impact assessment</i>	<p>This section applies if the NT EPA has directed the proponent to include additional information in the SER under EP regulation 119(2); or if further impact assessment is required to respond to submissions received in relation to the referral information.</p> <p>Describe how the matters identified in submissions and any direction have been assessed, and how any potential impacts have been avoided, mitigated or offset in accordance with the environmental decision-making hierarchy pursuant to section 26 of the EP Act. Identify any residual adverse impacts on the environment that cannot be avoided or mitigated.</p>

Item	Matters to be addressed in the SER
	<p>Where a direction is given, or submission received, that requires further assessment of specific potential significant environmental impacts to be addressed in the SER, include the following information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a description of how the SER meets the requirements of section 42(b) of the EP Act: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – all actions that may have a significant impact on the environment are assessed, planned and carried out taking into account: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the principles of ecologically sustainable development; and ▪ the environmental decision-making hierarchy; and ▪ the waste management hierarchy; and ▪ ecosystem-based management; and ▪ the impacts of a changing climate.¹⁰ • a description of how the SER meets the requirements of section 43 of the EP Act: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A proponent of an action has the following general duties under an environmental impact assessment process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to provide communities that may be affected by a proposed action with information and opportunities for consultation to assist each community's understanding of the proposed action and its potential impacts and benefits; ▪ to consult with affected communities, including Aboriginal communities, in a culturally appropriate manner; ▪ to seek and document community knowledge and understanding (including scientific and traditional knowledge and understanding) of the natural and cultural values of areas that may be impacted by the proposed action; ▪ to address Aboriginal values and the rights and interests of Aboriginal communities in relation to areas that may be impacted by the proposed action; ▪ to consider the principles of ecologically sustainable development in the design of the proposed action; ▪ to apply the environmental decision-making hierarchy in the design of the proposed action;

¹⁰ Refer to section 42 of the [EP Act](#) (Purpose of environmental impact assessment process), p. 24.

Item	Matters to be addressed in the SER
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to consider the waste management hierarchy in the design of the proposed action.¹¹ • the existing risks to, and potential significant impacts on, environmental values • the cumulative impacts of a proposed action or strategic proposal • environmental factors and objectives – describe, and provide information about, the potentially significant environmental impacts under each relevant environmental factor.
<p><i>Key environmental factors</i></p>	<p>Where the submissions received in relation to the referral information, or a direction given by the NT EPA, requires further assessment of potential significant environmental impacts of the proposal; describe those impacts under the relevant <u>NT EPA environmental factors and objectives</u>, listed in order of significance with the following heading structure and content for each factor.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Name of environmental factor – e.g. <i>Inland water environmental quality</i> 2. Objective for environmental factor – e.g. <i>Protect the quality of groundwater and surface water so that environmental values including ecological health, land uses and the welfare and amenity of people are maintained.</i> 3. Policy and guidance - list the relevant policy and guidance for issues under this factor, as relevant to the proposal. 4. Environmental values <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the existing environment and environmental values relevant to this factor that would potentially be impacted by implementation of the proposal and reference the sources of information used. The NT EPA recognises that a specific environmental value may be relevant to more than one factor.¹² • Provide a summary of the surveys and studies undertaken for the proposal, including the dates and timing of surveys, referencing standards and guidance used. • Include maps which show both the local and regional context of the proposal, an overlay of the proposal boundary and indicative disturbance footprint on a base layer showing the local and regional environmental values related to the factor.

¹¹ Refer to section 43 of the [EP Act](#) (General duty of proponents),

¹² The NT EPA emphasises the need for Proponents to identify values and potential impacts as part of the consultation process and in collaboration with Traditional Owners and affected Aboriginal people.

Item	Matters to be addressed in the SER
	<p>5. Assessment of potential significant environmental impacts (focussed on addressing the submissions received in relation to the referral and any direction given by the NT EPA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify, describe and evaluate the significance of direct, indirect and cumulative potential impacts and risks to environmental values, under each of the relevant factors and objectives. Where relevant, evaluate the cumulative impacts of other proposals or activities to the environmental values. Identify and quantify benefits arising from the proposal. • Evaluate the potentially significant impacts, as defined under section 11 of the EP Act. That is, an impact of major consequence having regard to the context and intensity of the impact; and the sensitivity, value and quality of the environment impacted on and the duration, magnitude and geographic extent of the impact. • Define the potentially significant impacts and risks from all stages of the proposal, with consideration of the extent, magnitude and duration of the impact; the resilience of the environment to cope with impacts or change; and any potential cumulative impacts. Consider potentially significant impacts associated with normal operations, abnormal operations, unplanned shutdowns of part or all of the plant or facility and emergency shutdowns of part or all of the plant or facility. Provide an indication of the number of hours each year that it is expected that the plant or facility would be in abnormal, unplanned shutdown or emergency shutdown conditions. • Provide information that permits the general reader to understand the likelihood of occurrence and severity of each potentially significant environmental impact presented by the proposal. Consideration of risks presented by the proposal may be guided by undertaking a risk assessment consistent with the AS/ISO 31000 risk management series. However, the inclusion of large risk assessment tables should be avoided. • Clearly justify the level of analysis and investigation of the potentially significant environmental impacts, commensurate with the severity of the impact. The analysis, including development of likelihood and consequence ratings for inherent and residual risk assessments, is to be

Item	Matters to be addressed in the SER
	<p>based on referenced and relevant actual data and modelled predictions as appropriate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where there is scientific uncertainty about the potential significance, scale or extent of an impact, identify the uncertainties and provide a detailed description of how uncertainties would be addressed, such as through an adaptive management approach incorporating monitoring and staging. Where uncertainty remains, adopt the precautionary principle and demonstrate how it has been met (section 19 of EP Act). <p>6. Avoidance, mitigation and offsets</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the avoidance, mitigation and offset measures that would be implemented to manage the potentially significant environmental impacts of the proposal and ensure the environmental objective is highly likely to be met. • Include measures that are specific, enforceable and unambiguous. Where formulating strategies for avoidance, mitigation or offsets, detail how alternatives have been considered. • Draft management plans may be appended to the SER where it is considered that management measures would need to be conditioned in an environmental approval for the proposal, or if specific management plans are required in the direction. • Demonstrate that any proposed measures to manage potential significant impacts are accepted as best practice within that industry. • Where it is considered likely that there would be potentially significant residual impacts, provide a clear explanation of the acceptability of the residual impacts and describe if and how any residual impacts would be offset and how any proposed offset would compensate for the impact.¹³ Any proposed offsets are consistent with the Northern Territory Offsets Framework.¹⁴ <p>7. Predicted outcome / conclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe the predicted outcome against the factor's environmental objective, and state whether there are likely to be any significant residual environmental impacts. Where

¹³ Where proposals are located on Aboriginal freehold or native title land, discussion about offsets should be conducted as part of land use agreement consultation.

¹⁴ DENR 2020, [Northern Territory Offsets Framework](#).

Item	Matters to be addressed in the SER
	<p>it is considered likely that there would be potentially significant residual impacts, describe if and how these residual impacts would be offset and how any proposed offset would compensate for the impact.</p> <p>Potential significant environmental impacts identified during the referral process should not be interpreted as excluding other matters of potential environmental significance that may emerge during preparation of an SER through environmental studies, consultation with affected communities, submissions or other sources.</p> <p>The SER should be prepared using this guidance document in addition to the matters raised in submissions and, if applicable, any matters identified in a direction to include additional information in the SER. Relevant supporting information may be appended to the SER.</p>
<i>Other environmental factors</i>	<p>Identify and describe any other previously unidentified environmental matters or factors that have emerged during the assessment process, including during stakeholder engagement.</p>
<i>Whole of environment considerations</i>	<p>Provide a holistic assessment of the impacts of the proposal on the whole of the environment (where relevant), including a description of the connections and interactions between the environmental factors, acknowledging that impacts may be cumulative across environmental factors. Succinctly discuss predicted outcomes in relation to the principles of environment protection and management (EP Act Part 2) and the NT EPA's environmental objectives and any of the Minister's declared environmental objectives.</p>
<i>Responding to a direction to provide additional information</i>	<p>Where the NT EPA has directed the proponent to include additional information, either in the SER (under regulation 119), or in addition to the SER (under regulation 124), or under regulation 83; clearly address the additional information requirements, and resolve any information gaps. Where necessary, provide additional studies, technical reports, modelling and other information to respond to the NT EPA direction.</p> <p>Cross reference the table of additional information requirements provided by the NT EPA with the direction, to the location in the document where each additional information requirement is addressed, so that the reader is able to easily locate the specific information.</p>
<i>Appendices</i>	<p>The appendices should include at a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • spatial coordinates of the proposal footprint and site technical studies • the name of, work done by, and the qualifications and experience of, the persons involved in the studies and preparing the report • tabulation on the approach taken implementing the environmental decision-making hierarchy • detailed technical information, studies or investigations necessary to support the main text.

Appendix 1 – SER process flow chart

