# PART A

# INFORMATION FOR THE PUBLIC

## Guidelines for Preparation of

## a Public Environmental Report

# Victoria Highway Upgrade
# To Improve Flooding Immunity

## Ch. 185 to 220 km

# 1. Introduction

These Guidelines have been developed to assist the Road Network Division of the Northern Territory Department of Planning and Infrastructure in preparing a Public Environmental Report (PER) for the upgrade of the Victoria Highway between 185 km and 220 km west of Katherine, NT, in accordance with Clause 8 of the Environmental Assessment Administrative Procedures of the *Environmental Assessment Act (1982)* of the Northern Territory. These Guidelines have been prepared by the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) within the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts.

These Guidelines consist of two sections:

- Part A (this section) is the introduction and description of the project and the PER process; and
- Part B (attached) details the type and extent of information to be included in the PER. The list includes issues and concerns that were identified before the Government review period for the Notice of Intent (NOI) for the proposed works.

# 2. The Proposal

## 2.1 Background and Objectives

The Northern Territory Department of Planning and Infrastructure (DPI) propose to upgrade sections of the Victoria Highway (the Highway) in the vicinity of the Victoria River, Northern Territory (between Chainages 185 km to 220 km). This section of the Highway is to be upgraded primarily to improve its flood immunity and maintain connectivity between the east and west of Australia. The current flooding of the Highway has a significant economic impact with the loss of connectivity resulting in a direct impact on freight, strategic and tourist movements.

The Highway is part of the National Land Transport Network which is owned and managed by the NT Government and with funding from the Commonwealth through the Auslink Program. The Road Network Division of DPI is the NT Government agency with responsibility for strategic asset management of the Northern Territory road network, policy setting, network planning and developing forward works strategies, programs and projects.

The objectives of the proposed works are to:

- provide improved flooding immunity to a road that is currently closed for parts of most wet seasons;
- provide a road consistent with adjoining sections of the Victoria Highway standards, and in particular to at least a 1 in 20 year storm event; and
- improve road users' safety when using this section of the Highway

The 35 km of Highway that this proposal focuses on is located in the Victoria River catchment and includes the Victoria River road bridge crossing. This is the last remaining section of the Victoria Highway still to be upgraded; the immunity upgrading of the balance of the Victoria Highway was completed in 1997. The Victoria Highway in this section is closed for parts of most wet seasons due to the floodwaters rising above the existing Victoria River Bridge. Furthermore, the flooding of the Victoria River causes backflow into tributaries of the main channel, which also results in flooding of minor creeks and drainage lines, and hence the Victoria Highway.

## 2.2 Proposed Works and Locations

There are eight impact areas along the Victoria Highway between Ch. 185 km to 220 km. This approximates to that section of the Highway between 8 km east of the Victoria River, to the Fitzroy Station turn-off. The eight sites total 15.7 km of road and comprise of four river crossings to be raised, two locations where the Highway is to be raised and two locations where new passing lanes are proposed.

Table 1 summarises the sites, the proposed works and the impact areas.

**Table 1 Impact areas and their locations**

| Site | Name | Chainage (km) | Length of Corridor (km) | Max impact width (from existing road centreline) | Approx impact area (ha) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Passing lane | Ch. 186.2 – 189.2 | 3.0 | 30 m one side | 9.0 |
| 2 | Victoria River bridge | Ch. 192.8 – 195.2 | 2.4 | 60 m north side;<br>30 m south side | 12.6 |
| 3 | Highway to be raised | Ch. 195.5 – 196.5 | 1.0 | 40 m either side | 6.0 |
| 4 | Highway to be raised | Ch. 202.3 – 202.9 | 0.6 | 45 m north side;<br>50 m south side | 3.75 |
| 5 | Joe Creek bridge | Ch. 203.5 – 205.4 | 1.9 | 60 m north side;<br>30 m south side | 8.2 |
| 6 | Lost Creek bridge | Ch. 206.7 – 209.7 | 3.0 | 45 m north side;<br>80 m south side | 16.4 |
| 7 | Passing lane | Ch. 210.5 – 213.5 | 3.0 | 30 m one side | 9.0 |
| 8 | Sandy Creek bridge | Ch. 216.6 – 218.3 | 1.7 | 15 m north side;<br>50 m south side | 7.1 |

## 2.3 Timing

All major construction work will be undertaken during the dry season to ensure:

- progress is not interrupted due to rain and wet soils;
- adequate access into and out of the area for construction activities, personnel and equipment (i.e. no road closures due to flooding);
- the potential for accelerated erosion and adverse environment impacts are minimised in areas of cleared vegetation, before rehabilitation and stabilisation is completed.

Some activities that can be undertaken during the wet season will be started or completed (e.g. some components of survey and bridge construction). Major soil disturbance or earthwork activities will not be conducted during the wet season. Construction activities are expected to commence in 2006 and be finalised in 2008.

## 2.4 Gravel and Fill

A significant amount of gravel and fill will be required for the project as a result of the road being raised above natural surface in a number of areas. An estimated 30,000 $m^3$ of gravel is needed for the works within one year of commencement of construction. However, this may increase to 80,000 $m^3$ if the scope of the construction contract is expanded to include pavement rehabilitation between Ch. 186 to Ch. 220 km, which would be planned over a timeframe of 10-20 years. The majority of existing known deposits of suitable material are now located within Gregory National Park, and are considered unsuitable for environmental reasons. In order to provide sufficient quantities of gravel and sand, it is proposed that a combination of existing and new sites is used.

Three existing sites are located outside of Gregory National Park:

- Ch 218.1 offset 11.5 km left, via link load opposite Fitzroy Station.
- Ch 243.46 offset 0.35 km left, via link load opposite Coolibah Station.
- Ch 215.19 offset 4.35 km left, via link load opposite Coolibah Station.

Three proposed new sites are located within channel bed deposits of the Victoria River:

- Ch. 202.89 km offset 0.35 km right, via link road from Victoria Highway.
- Ch. 215.09 km offset 5.0 km right, via Coolibah Access Road.
- Ch. 218.09 km offset 4.0 km right, via Fitzroy Access Road.

In addition to the gravel, approximately 400,000 m3 fill is required for the project. This is proposed to be extracted from one location (25-30 ha), an existing borrow pit located on freehold land south of the Victoria River Roadhouse.

### 2.5. Water Resources

Water resources are limited during the dry season in the Victoria River area. It is proposed that construction water requirements will be obtained from existing or new bores, with some extraction from the Victoria River when flow conditions allow.

## 3. Approvals Required/ Applicable legislation

This proposal was referred to the EPA by the proponent for determination of assessment requirements under the *Environmental Assessment Act*.

The proposal has been declared a controlled action under the Australian Government *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* (EPBC Act)Because it is likely to have a significant impact on matters of national environmental significance (NES). The controlling provisions for the action are Sections 18 and 18A of the Act (Listed threatened species and communities), and include the listed vulnerable Purple-crowned fairy wren and Freshwater sawfish. The proposal will be assessed in accordance with Schedule 1 to the "*Agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia and the Northern Territory under s.45 of the EPBC Act relating to Environmental Impact Assessment*" (the Bilateral Agreement).

Other environmental approvals which may be required include:

- Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority Certificates;
- A permit under the *Heritage Conservation Act* to undertake works that may destroy, damage, demolish or desecrate a heritage place or object;
- A permit under the *Water Act* to extract water from the Victoria River, existing or new groundwater bores.

## 4. Purpose of the PER

The PER aims to provide:

- a source of information from which individuals and groups may gain an understanding of the proposal, the need for the proposal, the economic and other benefits that might arise from the project, the alternatives, the environment that it would affect, the impacts that may occur and the measures taken to minimise those impacts;

- a basis for public consultation and informed comment on the proposal; and
- a framework against which decision-makers can consider the environmental aspects of the proposal, set conditions for approval to ensure environmentally sound development and recommend an environmental management and monitoring program.

The object of these Guidelines is to identify those matters that should be addressed in the PER. The Guidelines are based on the initial outline of the proposal in the NOI. Not all matters indicated in the Guidelines may be relevant to all aspects of the proposal. Only those matters that are relevant to the proposal should be addressed. The Guidelines, however, are not necessarily exhaustive. They should not be interpreted as excluding from consideration any matters which are currently unforeseen that emerge as important or significant from scientific studies or otherwise during the preparation of the PER or the public consultation process.

The PER should be a self-contained and comprehensive document written in a clear, concise style that is easily understood by the general reader. Cross-referencing should be used to avoid unnecessary duplication of text. Text should be supported where appropriate by maps, plans, diagrams or other descriptive material. Detailed technical information and baseline surveys should be included as appendices.

Content in the PER should include both quantitative and qualitative analysis as appropriate. Impacts should not just be treated as adverse: beneficial effects should also be identified. The justification of the project in the manner proposed should be consistent with the principles of ecologically sustainable development. Assessment of the environmental impacts of the proposal and alternatives should be comprehensive. For the purpose of these Guidelines, the "principles of ecologically sustainable development" are as follows:

- the precautionary principle - namely, that if there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation;
- inter- and intra-generational equity - namely, that the present generation should ensure that the health, diversity and productivity of the environment are maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations;
- conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity; and
- improved valuation and pricing of environmental resources.

# 5. PER Process

The PER process, as described by the Administrative Procedures of the *Environmental Assessment Act 1982* of the Northern Territory, is displayed in Figure 1. Modified procedures apply for this proposal due to assessment under the Bilateral Agreement.

**Overview of the Process**

Once the Minister has determined that a PER is required, the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) prepares Draft Guidelines for Preparation of a PER, after consulting with relevant advisory bodies and the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage (DEH).

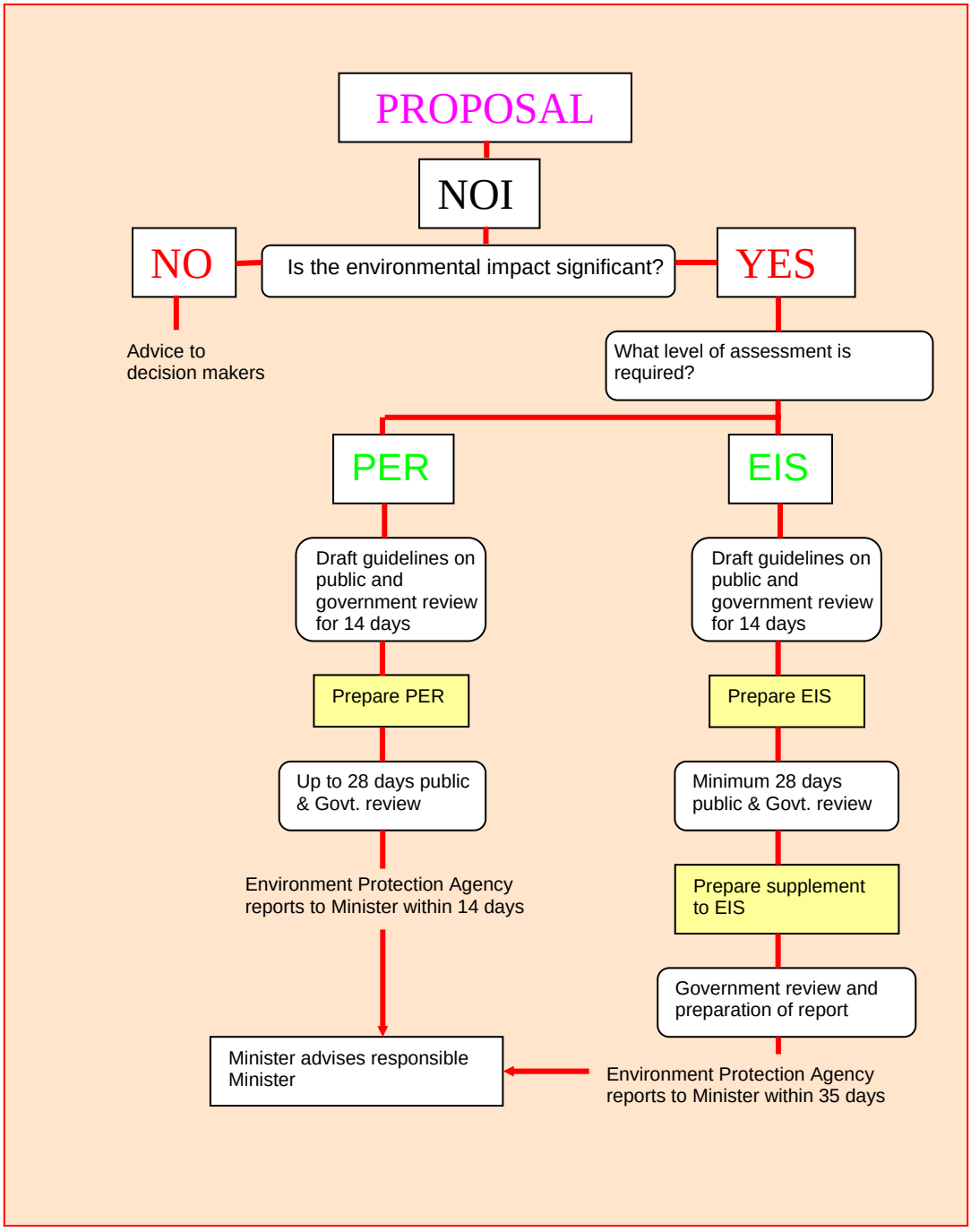
These Draft Guidelines are then subject to public review for a 14-day period. At the end of this period, EPA has 14 days to finalise the Draft Guidelines for Ministerial approval. When approved, the final Guidelines are forwarded to the proponent.

When the proponent has prepared a PER, this document is exhibited for public review and comment for up to 28 days, during which time the general public and advisory bodies have an opportunity to provide comment on the document.

Due to the application of modified procedures for this proposal under Schedule 1 of the Bilateral Agreement, the proponent must prepare a supplement to the report taking into account the comments received during the exhibition period. EPA has 14 days after lodgement of the supplement to prepare the Environmental Assessment Report and Recommendations, based on the PER, the comments received and the supplement. If the NT Minister for Natural Resources, the Environment and Heritage approves the Report and Recommendations, these are forwarded to the Australian Government Minister for the Environment and Heritage who will make a decision whether or not to approve the proposal under the EPBC Act. In making this determination, the Australian Government Minister will take into account the PER, the NT Assessment Report and any relevant economic and social matters. If the Minister approves the proposed action, then the action must be implemented in accordance with the conditions of approval under the EPBC Act and any approval requirements under the NT *Environmental Assessment Act*.

The Assessment Report and Recommendations are included on the DNRETA website and hard copies are provided to respondents and selected public libraries and viewing sites.

**Figure 1 The Northern Territory Environmental Assessment Process**




NOI - Notice of Intent
PER - Public Environment Report
EIS - Environmental Impact Statement