

Information sheet

Petroleum and gas activities

Considering environmental requirements early in petroleum activity planning

This information sheet provides general advice regarding ways to avoid adverse outcomes when undertaking petroleum activities by considering environmental regulatory obligations early in the planning process. The advice relates to petroleum activities that are environmentally relevant activities as defined in the Environmental Protection Act 1994.

Why consider environmental requirements early in planning an activity?

It is recognised and commonly understood that by the nature of the petroleum industry the actual location of certain activities (for example well pads and associated access tracks, or parking and turning bays) is not always known at the initial stages of the project, particularly when making an application for a new environmental authority (EA). This information comes to light as the P&G activities progress and more localised areas to target for exploration and subsequently production are identified.

Additionally, as there can be limited availability of some infrastructure, such as drilling rigs, access to this infrastructure is critical to industry success. Knowing any limitations on the types and locations of activities authorised within existing EAs and ensuring sufficient lead time to request any necessary EA amendments should be a priority for industry planning.

The earlier that these environmental requirements can be identified, including the need for any EA amendments, the more likely that the applicant and the Department of Environment and Science can discuss and resolve any concerns or limitations on planned activities.

The above scenarios, when not sufficiently planned for, can result in the following unexpected adverse outcomes for industry:

- 1) Rehabilitation costs are significantly higher where activities are located in environmentally sensitive areas¹ rather than located in pre-disturbed or other areas of lesser environmental value.
- 2) Project delays where insufficient time is allowed to obtain necessary EA amendments to enable petroleum activities (e.g. drilling) to commence.

Benefits of considering environmental requirements early in the planning for a petroleum activity include:

- ensuring compliance with statutory obligations to obtain relevant EAs
- avoiding unexpected delays whilst waiting for EAs
- adequately resourcing activities at the appropriate stages in a project—for example by knowing when to engage expert advice to assist with compiling application documents or plans

¹ Environmentally sensitive areas are prescribed in Schedule 19 of the Environmental Protection Regulation 2019 and mapping is available by searching for 'maps of environmentally sensitive areas' on the Department of Environment and Science's website: www.des.qld.gov.au.

- avoiding unexpected costs of compliance with environmental requirements after infrastructure is already built and/or after disturbance has already been caused.

Tools available to assist with early site planning and important considerations

There are a number of resources available to industry to assist with considering environmental regulatory requirements early in the project or site planning process:

- The Business Queensland website contains information that is packaged to assist industry to meet its regulatory obligations (search for 'Regulatory framework for CSG–LNG industry' at www.business.qld.gov.au)
- Application material can be found by searching the Business Queensland website for 'applying for an environmental authority'
- Maps and spatial data sets to assist with planning are available from the department's website (search for 'maps and data online' at www.des.qld.gov.au)
- The department offers pre-design/pre-lodgement meetings to provide direction and advice regarding environmental authority applications and relevant timeframes. A meeting request form can be downloaded from the department's website (search for 'pre-design' or 'pre-lodgement' at www.des.qld.gov.au).

Considerations when site planning

The following points may be useful to consider when planning a petroleum activity:

- It is important to understand what the environmental values are on a site and how they are protected under the relevant regulatory instruments.
- Environmentally sensitive areas¹ have higher environmental value and where disturbance is authorised to occur in these areas, generally more stringent rehabilitation requirements will be imposed compared to areas of lower environmental value. The rehabilitation conditions that may be imposed for activities in environmentally sensitive areas could require that all predominant species in the ecologically dominant layer of the pre-disturbance regional ecosystem(s) are present in the rehabilitated area. For non-environmentally sensitive areas, the conditions likely to be imposed allow more flexibility in the composition of species in the rehabilitated area.
- It is important to know the location of areas of environmental value when planning activities, and try to avoid locating infrastructure or causing disturbance within these areas—being mindful that in some highly sensitive areas, disturbance will be prohibited.
- Certain petroleum infrastructure may be transferred to the landholder before the surrender of the EA. See the guideline 'Transferring petroleum infrastructure to landholders' (ESR/2020/5403) for more information. Early discussions with the landholder are strongly encouraged during the planning phase to ensure that infrastructure of use to a landholder is identified early and can be sited in a location considered most suitable to the post-activity land use.

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- Factor in the lead times for applying for and obtaining an EA when scheduling the operational aspects of the petroleum activity. A full site-specific application and assessment process can take 55 business days to complete under the statutory timeframes in the *Environmental Protection Act 1994*. This can be significantly reduced if applications are well supported by evidence and meet all information requirements in the department's guidelines. Advice gained through pre-lodgement meetings can also assist with compiling applications.
- Be aware that amendments to an existing EA may be required as the project moves through different stages in its lifecycle, or if the nature of the authorised activity changes.
- The department has the power under the *Environmental Protection Act 1994* to impose conditions through an EA that are necessary or desirable for managing the environmental impacts of an activity. Below are some **example** conditions related to site planning that the department may impose to avoid impacts on biodiversity, and these principles are useful to consider early in site planning:
 1. The location of the petroleum activity(ies) must be selected in accordance with the following site planning principles:
 - a. maximise the use of areas of pre-existing disturbance
 - b. in order of preference, avoid, minimise or mitigate any impacts, including cumulative impacts, on areas of native vegetation or other areas of ecological value
 - c. minimise disturbance to land that may otherwise result in land degradation
 - d. in order of preference, avoid then minimise isolation, fragmentation or dissection of tracts of native vegetation; and
 - e. in order of preference, avoid then minimise clearing of native mature trees.
 2. Linear infrastructure construction corridors must:
 - a. maximise co-location
 - b. be minimised in width to the greatest practicable extent; and
 - c. for linear infrastructure that is an essential petroleum activity authorised in an environmentally sensitive area or its protection zone, be no greater than 40m in total width.

Definitions

Terms underlined in this fact sheet are defined in the *Environmental Protection Act 1994*.

Further information

For more information, search for 'applying for an EA' on the Business Queensland website:

www.business.qld.gov.au

Version history

Version	Date	Version details
1.00	April 2014	Original version
1.01	26 June 2018	The document template, header and footer have been updated to reflect current Queensland Government corporate identity requirements and comply with the Policy Register

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Version	Date	Version details
1.02	27 October 2020	Updated to include matters relating to the transfer of petroleum infrastructure to landholders.