



Driving the economic development of Queensland

Townsville State Development Area

Environmental Impact Assessment

When is an environmental impact statement (EIS) required?

Environmental assessment in Queensland is required in various forms under a number of statutes. This Fact Sheet however, concentrates on outlining the impact assessment processes which are likely to be required for major new projects locating in the Townsville State Development Area (TSDA).

In late October 2003, the TSDA was declared under the *State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971* (the Act). Following declaration of the TSDA, the Coordinator-General is required under the Act to prepare a development scheme for the TSDA. The development scheme which has been prepared by the Coordinator-General for the TSDA is similar in many respects to a local government planning scheme prepared under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*.

Under the development scheme for the TSDA, any proponent wishing to establish a new land-use, must seek the prior approval of the Coordinator-General. A proponent will seek the approval of the Coordinator-General through the application, referral and assessment process set out in section 9 of the development scheme.

An application made to the Coordinator-General under section 9 must contain certain prescribed information and be accompanied by either a planning report or an environmental impact statement. The terms 'planning report' and 'environmental impact statement' are defined in section 2(1) of the development scheme (the Townsville State Development Area Development Scheme Fact Sheet provides more detail on the application process)

The Coordinator-General decides on the level of assessment required to be undertaken by project proponents in respect of future applications for development in the TSDA. If the Coordinator-General requires proponents to submit environmental impact statements in support of their proposals rather than planning reports, these environmental impact statements will be prepared by proponents in accordance with Terms of Reference provided by the Coordinator-General.

The environmental issues which may be required to be assessed under an environmental impact statement could,

depending on the nature of the proposal, include matters such as:

- air quality
- water quality
- fauna
- flora
- impacts on local road and rail networks
- noise
- safety
- flooding
- waste disposal
- visual impacts
- social and economic impacts

Steps in the process conducted under the State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971

Apart from the EIS process under the development scheme, the *State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971* provides a statutory process for the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in Part 4 – Environmental Coordination. Under section 26 of this Act, the Coordinator-General may declare a proposal a 'significant project'. A significant project declaration triggers the need for an EIS to be prepared under the provisions of sections 29 to 35 of the Act. The heavy industry development envisaged for part of the TSDA is likely to be the type of development which the Coordinator-General would consider to be a 'significant project'. The following is a description of steps in the EIS assessment process under the Act for a 'significant project'.

Initial advice statement (IAS)

Proponents for major developments generally give the Coordinator-General an initial advice statement (IAS) which provides detailed information about the project. Such detail may include an outline of the proposed development, the potential effects on the existing environment of the development and possible mitigation measures to minimise any adverse effects.



Driving the economic development of Queensland

'Significant Project' declaration

Should the Coordinator-General make a decision to declare a 'significant project,' then the declaration is publicly notified by Gazette notice.

Terms of reference

Draft Terms of Reference for the EIS may be developed in consultation with key advisory agencies including the Townsville City Council and the proponent. The draft Terms of Reference for a significant project are required to be publicly advertised. When finalising Terms of Reference, the Coordinator-General has regard to comments received on the draft Terms of Reference, including those which may be received from the community. The Terms of Reference are the basis for the preparation of an EIS.

Preparation and contents of an EIS

Preparation of an EIS may involve matters such as conducting baseline studies to establish the quality of the existing environment (natural, social, economic and built) as well as undertaking comprehensive specific studies to determine the potential impacts of the proposed development on these environmental factors.

Appraisal and public review

Once the EIS has been prepared to the satisfaction of the Coordinator-General, notification is given in local, regional and (if needed) national newspapers about the availability of the EIS and how submissions may be made to the Coordinator-General. The Coordinator-General may ask the proponent for additional information about the EIS following the public consultation process.

Coordinator-General's Report

The final step in the process is the Coordinator-General's Report. In reaching a conclusion about the EIS, the Coordinator-General takes into account all submissions lodged and accepted and any other material the Coordinator-General considers is relevant to the project.

Why undertake environmental impact assessment?

The main purpose of environmental impact assessment is to inform decision-makers of the likely impacts, both adverse and beneficial, of a proposal at its inception. Environmental assessment helps to identify, early in the life of a proposal, key issues associated with it and the stakeholders who will be involved so that potentially adverse impacts can be addressed before final decisions are made.

The process used in environmental impact assessment is to first establish, and then to critically analyse, the environmental impacts likely to arise from a development proposal.

An outcome of undertaking an EIS could be the development of environmental management plans aimed at minimising environmental harm.

Contact details

Further information can be obtained by telephoning the
Department of State Development and Innovation:

Brisbane (07) 3405 5634

Townsville (07) 4799 7412