

EPA Environmental Impact Assessment Processes Review

Planning Group Meeting held on 4 June – 2 – 4pm

Notes of Meeting

Present: Paul Vogel – Chair
Roger Severn – CCWA
Brian Wood – DOIR
Andrew Bartleet – DOIR
Anne Hill – DPI
DPI – Marion Thompson
Sandra McLeish – Department of Planning and Infrastructure
Shelley Shepherd – Environmental Consultants Association
Steven Gill – Housing Industry Association
Joanne Abbiss – WALGA
Paul Gamblin - WWF
Mark Jeffries – EPASU
Charlie Welker – Review Team

1. REVIEW OF PROGRESS

The Chair gave an update on Review progress.

2. REFERRAL OF SCHEMES TO EPA

Members were reminded that the number of schemes being referred to EPA was increasing with only a small percentage of these schemes are actually assessed. The low number of assessments is a result of discussions with planning authorities resulting in modifications to schemes and inclusion of text addressing environmental issues. While there is a desire to reduce the number of referrals, this reduction would not necessary translate to an overall decrease in workload for the EPASU. Amendments to the Planning and Development Act 2005 would be required to reduce referral of schemes to EPA.

Mark Jeffries, EPA SU, gave an analysis of referral statistics as agreed at the last meeting outlining the issues and merits associated with reducing referrals. Members noted that the problem was twofold – the high number of referrals that were forwarded to the Chair of the EPA for consideration resulting in few being assessed with the attendant transaction costs, and the resultant criticisms regarding time delays from proponents.

Alternative models to be considered are: to retain the existing system, delegate to Local Government power under the Act, transfer to WAPC or change internal processes (involving internal delegations).

Action: EPASU (Mark Jeffries) and external consultant Charlie Welker, Strategen to document how the system works with risks and benefits of alternative models to be brought back to next meeting of Working Group.

3. ASSESSMENT OF SCHEMES (STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT)

Members noted that discussion at the last meeting identified that a number of schemes are referred to EPA without information to enable a meaningful assessment of the referral. Discussion focussed on the need for structural planning and strategic assessments to provide more information to EPA to enable it to make more informed judgements on whether to assess or not the scheme or not. The outcome would need to be recognised in subsequent planning and EPA assessment processes.

It was noted that resourcing was an issue for a number of local authorities.

It was agreed that a paper identifying what the current process, what ideally a new system would involve, and problems associated with such to be developed and circulated for comment. Issues to be addressed are legislative change (including options), how to get whole of government process, and data expectations and access.

Action: EPASU (Mark Jeffries) and Shelly Shepherd ECA to develop paper and circulate for comment.

4. PRE-1996 SCHEMES AND INDUSTRIAL LAND

Marianne Thompson from DPI noted that there is a need for Government to devote resources and to develop process to deal with both industrial and housing land pre 1996. Examples of where issues have and may arise were tabled and noted.

It was agreed that there was a need to develop a Business Case for Government to consider covering the process, need for funding and benefits to the State. Initially resources were required to develop the data on which to base the Business Case; this would require approximately two days dedicated GIS from DPI and five days from EPA/DEC.

Action: EPASU (Mark Jeffries), Marion Thompson, DPI and Charlie Welker, Strategen to develop a paper to request resources for data gathering.

5. MOU

The preparation of a new MOU and associated schedules would be addressed following consideration of the Actions above.

6. NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting would be in four weeks.