

Environment Online

Knowledge Base Article – Digitising Environmental Impact Assessment under Part IV of the Environmental Protection Act 1986

15 August 2022



DOCUMENT DETAILS

1.1 Revision History

Revision Date	Author	Version	Change Reference & Summary
9 August 2022	Gerard O'Brien	0.01	Original draft
10 August 2022	Danielle Griffiths	0.02	Reviewed
14 August 2022	Darren O'Malley	1.0	Approved

Purpose of this article

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on environmental impact assessment (EIA) under Part IV of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* (EP Act) for the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) in a digital format using the Environment Online (EO) portal.

This article will assist applicants and members of the public to understand how to provide information through Environment Online in the best possible manner to ensure efficient and effective assessment of applications. Applications which contain inaccurate or incomplete information may result in protracted assessment timeframes, and if the information is not sufficient for the EPA to complete an assessment, further information may be requested, and this may incur fees.

Digitising EIA

The first release of Environment Online provides a more transparent, digitised process; real-time application status; email notifications; application management; a secure platform and is the first step towards a centralised hub and streamlined assessments.

Environment Online currently requests information via two formats; digital smart forms and application-based forms.

Digital smart forms have been created for applicants to enter requested information in fields or via other functionality such as drop-down menus, searchable lookups and pop-ups. Smart forms:

- Include the navigational stepper (left-hand pane)
- Contain quick links to guidance (right-hand pane)
- Show and hide questions based on answers provided
- Indicate mandatory fields, including a field validation process on submission
- Pre-populate based on previously entered information.
- Include an Attachments step allowing for supporting documentation to be uploaded in one place

Attachment-based forms provide direct links to the existing templates or forms which can be downloaded. Once completed, the forms can be uploaded along with any other supporting documentation including spatial data and submitted to the EPA.

Table 1 below outlines what referral and assessment information has been created as a digital smart form and what is an attachment-based form.

Digital smart form	Attachment-based form
s38 referral – new significant proposal	s38 referral – significant amendment of an approved proposal and/or condition
s38 referral – proposal of a prescribed class	s38 referral – proposal under an assessed scheme
s38 referral – strategic proposal	s38 referral – derived proposal
Amending a proposal during referral (s38C)	S48A – referral of a scheme

Amending a proposal during assessment (s43A)	Amend approved proposal or conditions (s45C)
Minor or Preliminary Works (s41A(3))	Consolidate/Divide Ministerial Statements (s45D)
Content Proposal Document	Change to condition (s46)
Environmental Scoping Document	Withdraw Ministerial Statement (s47A)
Environmental Review Document	Change of proponent (s38I)

Table 1: Environment Online Form

The digital smart forms also provide a pre-population function of physical elements, activity elements and aspects. Mitigations will pre-populate in a future release.

Physical elements are any physical components that may have, or are relevant to, a potential significant effect on the environment. For example, processing plant, borefield, dredge channel.

Activity elements are proposal activities associated with the operation and/or construction of a physical element which may have, or are relevant to, a potential significant effect on the environment. For example, clearing of native vegetation, water abstraction, dredging.

Aspects are the pathways in which the proposal’s activity elements are likely to impact and/or interact with the environment. For example, direct (clearing), change in groundwater levels, release to marine or estuarine waters.

Mitigations are a sequence of actions, as per the mitigation hierarchy outlined in the *Statement of environmental principles, factors, objectives and aims of EIA*, to help reduce adverse environmental impacts. E.g. avoidance, location of bore / abstraction rate, silt curtains.

Figure 1 below show how the physical elements, activity elements, aspects and mitigations relate to each other.

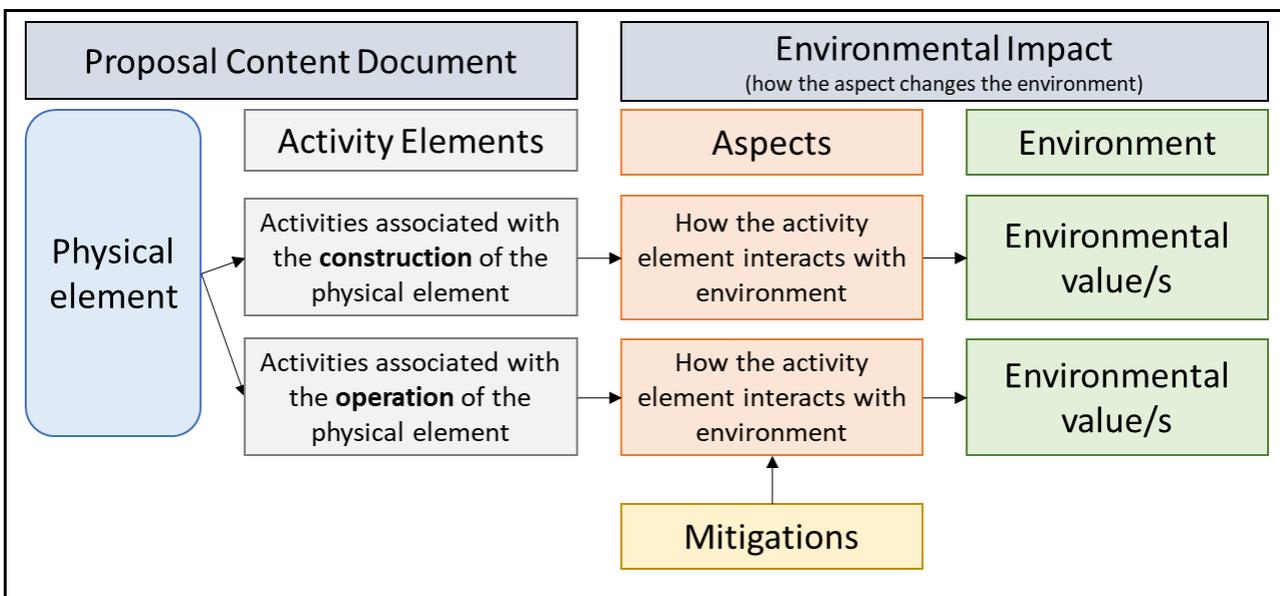


Figure 1. Relationship between physical elements, activity elements, aspects and mitigations

Stage 1: Referral of a proposal

Request a pre-referral meeting

Prior to referring a proposal to the EPA it is strongly encouraged that a pre-referral meeting is convened between the proponent and EPA Services to discuss the proposal. A pre-referral meeting can be requested via the 'Make an enquiry' button on your My Environment dashboard.

Further instructions can be found in *the Reference Guide – Request a pre-application meeting (proponent)*, available in [Environment Online knowledgebase](#).

Referral of a proposal

To refer a new significant proposal, proposal of a prescribed class or a strategic proposal to the EPA, a proponent will need to complete the following digital smart forms:

- New project (if not yet created)
- New proposal
- New application – EPA referral
- Environmental Review Document

The referral of a significant amendment, derived proposal, proposal under an assessed scheme, or a scheme or scheme amendment are submitted to the EPA through the attachment-based function. To access the templates and/or forms, navigate to the New Application page, select the relevant form, where you can download the template or form and upload the completed document and any other supporting information, and submit to the EPA.

Guidance on creating a proposal content document can be found in the *Reference Guide – Submit an attachment-based application*, available in [Environment Online knowledgebase](#)

If the referrer is a third party or decision-making authority, only a New application – refer a proposal form will need to be completed.

New project

A project is an outline on what you intend to do which includes a name and high-level description of a proposed action and location.

Prior to completing a new proposal or application an overarching project must be created. This allows for the association of multiple proposals and applications with a single project. It also lays the foundations to be built on in future releases for other approvals process applications across the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation, also being associated with the same single project while facilitating an integrated approvals pathway.

Further instructions on creating a project can be found in the *Reference Guide – Create a project (proponent)*, available in [Environment Online knowledgebase](#).

New proposal

The new proposal digital smart form represents the existing proposal content document as the required information in this form aligns with the existing Proposal Content Document template and associated instructions. However, there has been a slight change to some of the terminology; the construction and operational elements are input through the operation and construction phases of the activity elements that are linked to the physical element.

Guidance on creating a proposal content document can be found in the *Reference Guide – Create a proposal (proponent)*, available in [Environment Online knowledgebase](#).

New application – refer a proposal

To refer a new significant proposal, proposal of a prescribed class, or a strategic proposal to the EPA the EPA referral digital smart form should be completed. Instructions for proponents can be found *Reference Guide – Submit an application in Environment Online (proponent)*, available in [Environment Online knowledgebase](#). For referrals from a third party or decision-making authorities click on the New application button in your My Environment dashboard, select the relevant user to start the application and then click through the pages to enter the required information.

The Environmental review page within the EPA referral form, will navigated to the Environmental Review Document digital smart form. Once completing the Environmental Review Document form, you will be able to return to the referral form to complete the final pages, where a validation process will be undertaken on submission to ensure all the mandatory fields have been completed.

Environmental Review Document

The version of the Environmental Review Document (ERD) digital smart form when navigated from the EPA referral form is intended to capture the information as required by the Assessment of Environmental Impacts section in the current *Referral of a proposal under s.38 of the EP Act template*. It's important to note that this version contains fewer mandatory fields than an ERD that is required to be submitted to the EPA for assessment post level of assessment being determined. However, proponents aiming for an 'Assessment on referral information' should complete all sections of the ERD, beyond the mandatory fields required at referral.

Instructions for proponents can be found *Reference Guide – Submit an application in Environment Online (proponent)*, available in [Environment Online knowledgebase](#).

Amending a referred proposal

Environment Online provides a digital smart form for amending a new significant proposal, proposal of a prescribed class or strategic proposal during referral. This (change to proposal form) can be accessed from the application dashboard or via the New Application button on the My Environment dashboard.

When commencing the change to proposal digital smart form, the proposal content document will become editable to allow for the proposed amendment to be entered. If the request to amend is approved, the updated version of the proposal content document will become final; if the request is not approved the proposal content document originally submitted at referral will remain.

Instructions on how to submit a change to proposal can be found *Reference Guide – Submit an amendment to an application in Environment Online (proponent)*, available in [Environment Online knowledgebase](#).

Not proceeding with a referred proposal

New significant proposals, proposals of a prescribed class and strategic proposals are able to be withdrawn before level of assessment has been determined by selecting 'withdraw an application' under Related forms on the application dashboard. Instructions to withdraw can be found in the *Reference Guide – Withdraw, delete, or terminate an application (referral)*, available in [Environment Online knowledgebase](#).

Stage 2: EPA to decide whether or not to assess a referred proposal

Public comment on referred proposals

For referrals submitted via the digital smart forms in Environment Online, the EPA's consultation processes will be undertaken through Environment Online Public consultations page; this includes the seven-day public comment on referral. Project, proposal content document and referral (including the ERD) information will be publicly available for members of the public to submit comments to the EPA.

Requests for information

The EPA may request information from a proponent for various reasons. For applications submitted to the EPA via Environment Online, these information requests will be received via Environment Online and available on the registered user's dashboard. Emails will also be sent alerting the user of the request. Responses should be provided in Environment Online directly through the response fields, however information can also be uploaded and attached to the response.

Further instructions can be found in the *Reference Guide – Manage a request for information (proponent)*, available in [Environment Online knowledgebase](#).

Change of proponent

Change of proponent requests are submitted to the EPA through the attachment-based function. To access the form, navigate to the New Application page and select the nominate new proponent form. Download the form and upload once completed with any other supporting information and submit to the EPA.

Further instructions can be found in the *Reference Guide – Change a proponent during or after assessment (proponent)*, available in [Environment Online knowledgebase](#).

Stage 3: Assessment of proposals

Requests for information

As with Stage 2, the EPA may request information. This includes updates to the Environmental Scoping Document or Environmental Review Document, as well requesting a response to submissions and consultation on conditions. Further instructions can be found in the *Reference Guide – Manage a request for information (proponent)*, available in [Environment Online knowledgebase](#).

Scoping

If the EPA determines to assess a proposal, requiring a proponent-prepared Environmental Scoping Document, a task will appear on the proponent's dashboard requiring the proponent to complete and submit the Environmental Scoping Document digital smart form. Further instructions can be found in the *Reference Guide – Submit an Environmental Scoping Document (proponent)*, available in [Environment Online knowledgebase](#).

Additional information including Environmental Review Document

As with Stage 1, Environment Online provides for the proponent to prepare additional information, including an Environmental Review Document (ERD), as required by the EPA for assessment. Where the additional information is not an ERD e.g. environmental management plan or peer review, this can be provided by responding directly to the request for information.

Where an ERD is required a new version of the original ERD submitted with the referral will be available, as a task on the dashboard, to be amended and updated to reflect the requirements of the Environmental Scoping Document and/or as requested by the EPA. It's important to note that this will not replace the version submitted at referral. Also, as part of the ERD, aspects and mitigations are required to be identified and characterised at the beginning of the ERD prior to completing the Environmental Assessments step. This is to enable aspects and mitigations to be selected for the impact assessment of environmental values.

Further instructions on completing and submitting the ERD can be found in the *Reference Guide – Prepare additional information, include the Environmental Review Document (proponent)*.

Public consultation

If the additional information or ERD is subject to public review, the public consultation period will be undertaken through Environment Online which will provide access to the document/s, and the ability to provide submissions to the EPA.

The final approved additional information, including an ERD will be published and made publicly available Environment Online.

Amend proposal during assessment

Environment Online provides a digital smart form for amending a new significant proposal, proposal of a prescribed class or strategic proposal during referral. This (change to proposal form) can be accessed from the application dashboard or via the New Application button on the My Environment dashboard.

When commencing the change to proposal digital smart form, the proposal content document will become editable to allow for the proposed amendment to be entered. If the request to amend is approved, the updated version of the proposal content document will become final; if the request is not approved the proposal content document originally submitted at referral will remain.

Instructions on how to submit a change to proposal can be found *Reference Guide – Submit an amendment to an application in Environment Online (proponent)*, available in [Environment Online knowledgebase](#).

Terminate assessment

Assessment of new significant proposals, proposals of a prescribed class and strategic proposals are able to be terminated by selecting 'terminate an application' under Related forms on the application dashboard. Instructions to withdraw can be found in the *Reference Guide – Withdraw, delete, or terminate an application (referral)*, available in [Environment Online knowledgebase](#).

Minor and Preliminary Work

Requests for minor and preliminary work for proposals that are under assessment by the EPA through Environment Online can be submitted using the Minor and Preliminary Works digital smart form available on the New Application page or under the Related Forms on the application dashboard.

Further instructions can be found *Reference Guide – Submit a minor and preliminary works application in Environment Online (proponent)*, available in [Environment Online knowledgebase](#).

Stage 4: EPA report on the assessment of proposals

The EPA report and recommendation is published and made publicly available on Environment Online. Appeals on the EPA's report and recommendations continue through the Office of the Appeals Convenor.

Stage 5: Decision on a proposal and implementation

Requests for changing proposals and/or conditions with or without an assessment, and consolidating, dividing, or withdrawing Ministerial Statements are submitted in Environment Online via the attachment-based application function. To access the templates and/or forms, navigate to the New Application page, select the relevant form, where you can download the template or form and upload the completed document and any other supporting information, and submit to the EPA.

Guidance on creating a proposal content document can be found in the *Reference Guide – Submit an attachment-based application*, available in [Environment Online knowledgebase](#)

For the submission of reports or other documentation as part of a condition obligation (e.g. environmental management plans, compliance assessment report), these continue to be submitted via email to registrar@dwer.wa.gov.au.

