

Golden Beach Gas Project EES: Scoping Requirements process

Golden Beach Gas Project EES – Scoping Requirements FAQs

May 2020

What is the purpose of EES scoping requirements?

GB Energy (Vic) Pty Ltd is preparing an environment effects statement (EES) for the Golden Beach Gas Project, and the EES scoping requirements set out the matters that need to be investigated and documents within the EES.

Final EES scoping requirements have been approved by the Minister for Planning and are available on the DELWP website: <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/environment-assessment/browse-projects/projects/golden-beach-gas-project>

Why is an Environment Effects Statement (EES) required for the Golden Beach Gas project?

An EES is the most comprehensive and robust assessment process available in Victoria. The EES will provide an integrated and transparent examination of the proposed project and its environmental effects.

In September 2019 the Minister for Planning determined under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* that GB Energy (Vic) should prepare an EES for the Golden Beach Gas project. The project as proposed could have a range of significant effects relating to:

- offshore marine biodiversity values;
- Aboriginal cultural heritage values; and
- onshore biodiversity values including Lake Reeve, part of the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar site.

The EES will include a detailed description of the proposed project and rigorous assessment of its potential effects on the environment and approaches to mitigation. When completed the EES will be placed on public exhibition and the Minister for Planning will invite public comments on the EES. At the end of the process, the Minister will issue an assessment of the environmental effects of the project. The Minister's assessment will inform statutory decision-makers responsible for the project's approvals.

What about the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act?

The project was also referred to the Australian Government under the Commonwealth's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The delegate for the Minister for the Environment and Energy determined on 22 November 2019 that the project is a 'controlled action' requiring assessment and approval under the EPBC Act. The provisions for the Australian Government's controlled action decision under the EPBC Act are Ramsar wetlands (sections 16 and 17B), listed threatened species and communities (sections 18 and 18A), and listed migratory species (sections 20 and 20A).

The EES process is accredited to assess impacts on matters of national environmental significance under the EPBC Act through the Bilateral (Assessment) Agreement between the Commonwealth and the State of Victoria. The EES for the project will be undertaken in accordance with the bilateral agreement; there will be no separate assessment by the Commonwealth.

What studies are GB Energy doing to further identify any associated risks with the project?

In preparing the EES, GB Energy are undertaking a range of technical investigations to assess the potential impacts of the project. These investigations include biodiversity (marine and terrestrial), Aboriginal cultural heritage, groundwater and surface water, contaminated land, greenhouse gas, noise and vibration, air quality, historic and maritime heritage, landscape and visual, land use and planning, traffic and social.

These studies will inform strategies to avoid, minimise or mitigate potential impacts which will form an important part of the EES documentation.

Golden Beach Gas Project EES: Scoping Requirements process.

What are the final Scoping Requirements?

The set of matters to be investigated and documented in each EES are tailored to the project and its environmental risks. The draft scoping requirements for a project are prepared by the department on behalf of the Minister and then exhibited for 15 business days for comment by interested parties. The draft scoping requirements for the EES were informed by the proponent's referral and draft EES study program, as well as advice from agencies represented on the Technical Reference Group (TRG) and advice from the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.

The scoping requirements for the Golden Beach Gas Project EES represent a broad scope of issues that must be addressed by GB Energy in the EES. Assessment of effects as required by the scoping requirements must include discussion of all potential direct, indirect, on-site and off-site effects as result of the proposed project. Consistent with the Minister's decision for requiring an EES, the final scoping requirements cover a range of matters that need investigation, including impacts on biodiversity and habitat; cultural heritage; catchment values and hydrology; community amenity and greenhouse gas emissions; and land use, socio-economic, traffic and transport.

The broad nature of the final scoping requirements will ensure that the specific concerns raised through submissions are addressed in the EES. However, some minor refinements and editorial changes have been made to the scoping requirements to strengthen the clarity of issues, these changes included requiring the proponent to provide estimates of the workforce requirements for the project.

Was there public consultation for the draft scoping requirements?

An integral part of the EES process is the proponent engaging the public and stakeholders to identify and respond to their issues in conjunction with their EES studies.

GB Energy has already commenced consultation with stakeholders and the community on the EES. GB Energy has also preparing a consultation plan for the EES, outlining the opportunities and approaches for its community engagement during the preparation of the EES. The plan may be refined following advice from DELWP and the Technical Reference Group during the EES process. The EES consultation plan is published on the DELWP website: <https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/environment-assessment/browse-projects/projects/golden-beach-gas-project>.

Under its EES consultation plan, the proponent needs to inform the public and stakeholders about the EES process and its associated investigations to ensure they provide opportunities for input and engagement on these investigations.

Draft scoping requirements for the EES were exhibited for a period of 15 business days and closed 30 March 2020. Notice of the draft scoping requirements' exhibition was publicised on the DELWP website and via advertisements in major newspapers and a local newspaper.

One submission was received on the draft scoping requirements from a member of the local community.

Most of the issues raised in the submission received were environmental effects that were already included in the draft scoping requirements and therefore the final scoping requirements. The submission provided a valuable local perspective on the local community values and sensitivities of particular concern.

The submission has been provided to the proponent and the technical reference group to inform the ongoing development of the EES.

The key environmental issues raised in the submission relevant to the EES scope related to:

- Impacts from an influx of workers into the town during the construction phase;
- Concerns about the exploitation of a non-renewable resource and greenhouse gas implications;
- The availability of water resources in underground aquifers;
- Impacts on visual amenity; and
- Mental health impacts on the community associated with a gas commercial venture occurring near homes and recreation areas.

What happens now the Minister has issued the final scoping requirements?

The proponent will proceed with the necessary information-gathering and investigations to inform the EES. This is expected to take a number of months. The proponent will conduct its studies and prepare the EES in close consultation with DELWP and the Technical Reference Group (TRG) which DELWP has put in place for this EES.

The proponent will also need to implement its EES consultation plan to engage with the public and stakeholders about the EES process and its associated investigations, ensuring it provides opportunities for input and feedback on its investigations. The consultation plan may be reviewed and amended in consultation with DELWP during the EES process.

When the proponent believes the EES is ready, it will be reviewed by DELWP, and the Minister for Planning will then decide whether to authorise the EES to be exhibited. If authorised, the EES will be advertised for public comment for typically 30 business days.

The EES and the submissions received will be referred to an inquiry to be appointed under the *Environment Effects Act 1978*. The inquiry will consider all the information before it and will report to the Minister, who will then make an assessment and provide it to decision-makers (including the Commonwealth with regard to the required approvals under the EPBC Act).

After the Minister has made his assessment, the report of the inquiry and the Minister's assessment will be published on the DELWP website.

When does GB Energy expect to have an environmental effects statement released?

GB Energy are working towards having their EES ready for public exhibition in September 2020 (timing to be confirmed), when it goes on public exhibition for public comment. During this period GB Energy will continue to undertake planned engagement activities.

What is the Golden Beach Gas Project?

The project encompasses construction and operation of two sub-sea well heads, a gas pipeline and a gas compressor station. The project will produce gas from the Golden Beach Gas Field (in Victorian waters), for provision to the Victorian Transmission System. The gas pipeline would be designed to be bi-directional, allowing for the Golden Beach Gas Field, when depleted after 2 to 4 years, to be used for storing gas over a design life of 40 years.

The project includes:

- offshore drilling, testing and completion of two sub-sea wells;
- laying of a sub-sea pipeline and sub-sea infrastructure;
- a 1.5km shoreline crossing, approximately 3.8km south-west of Golden Beach;
- construction of an 18.5km buried pipeline generally in a 30m right of way; and
- associated apparatus and works including a compressor station, metering facility and shore crossing facility.