# Environment Effects Statement Preparation Advisory Note

## Guidance for proponents

Version [1.1]

VICTORIA State Government | Department of Transport and Planning

# Contents

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. About this advisory note

The **Environment Effects Statement (EES) Preparation Advisory Note** is to assist proponents in preparing EESs that are sound, meet minimum quality standards, focus on the relevant matters and ensure consistency, and accessibility of their documentation. It clarifies proponent responsibilities and can help inform stakeholders and the community about expectations of an EES.

Following a Ministerial decision that an EES is required, proponents are responsible for preparing a robust, adequate and efficient EES, in accordance with the *Ministerial Guidelines for Assessment of Environmental Effects under the Environment Effects Act 1978* (Eighth Edition, 2023) (Ministerial Guidelines), issued under section 10 of the Act by the Minister for Planning (Minister).

Building on the Ministerial Guidelines, this note sets out expectations for EES preparation associated with key aspects of the process, such as scoping, technical investigations, engagement with agencies on the Technical Reference Group (TRG), EES document preparation and adequacy review. This note should be read in conjunction with the *Ministerial Guidelines*. The note also covers tools, templates, and links to other supporting resources, to assist proponents in developing a well-structured, focused and effective EES.

This new advisory note is one of a suite of initiatives to support faster, more efficient and effective EESs, as part of the Victorian Government's commitments under the Economic Growth Statement (EGS) released in December 2024. There is a target of 18 months for completing new EESs under the EGS.

## 1.2. Who this advisory note is for

This advisory note is for project proponents and their consultants and sets out expectations to support the preparation of a robust, focused and adequate EES. It also assists in informing the community about the expectations of an EES. It outlines the process for preparing an EES once the Minister decides an EES is required, through to the Minister's authorisation for exhibition and public comment.

# 2. Process overview and tools

## 2.1. Overview of the EES process

In Victoria, works capable of having a significant effect on the environment (i.e. at a regional or state scale) require referral under the *Environment Effects Act 1978*, and *may* require an EES. The IAU administers the Act on behalf of the Minister for Planning in accordance with the *Ministerial Guidelines* (eighth edition, 2023). See the *Ministerial Guidelines* for more information on the entire EES process.

An EES is the state's most rigorous and transparent environmental assessment and is typically reserved for those projects that require integrated assessment across a range of potentially significant adverse effects.

Following a decision by the Minister for Planning that an EES is required, the first stage is 'scoping' which is the identification of key matters to be investigated and documented in the EES. Once the key matters are established, the proponent is able to confirm the necessary activities required to inform the preparation of the EES to assess the potential significant effects of the proposed project. These stages are represented in Figure 1 below and the expectations of the proponent in each stage are described in **Section 5**.

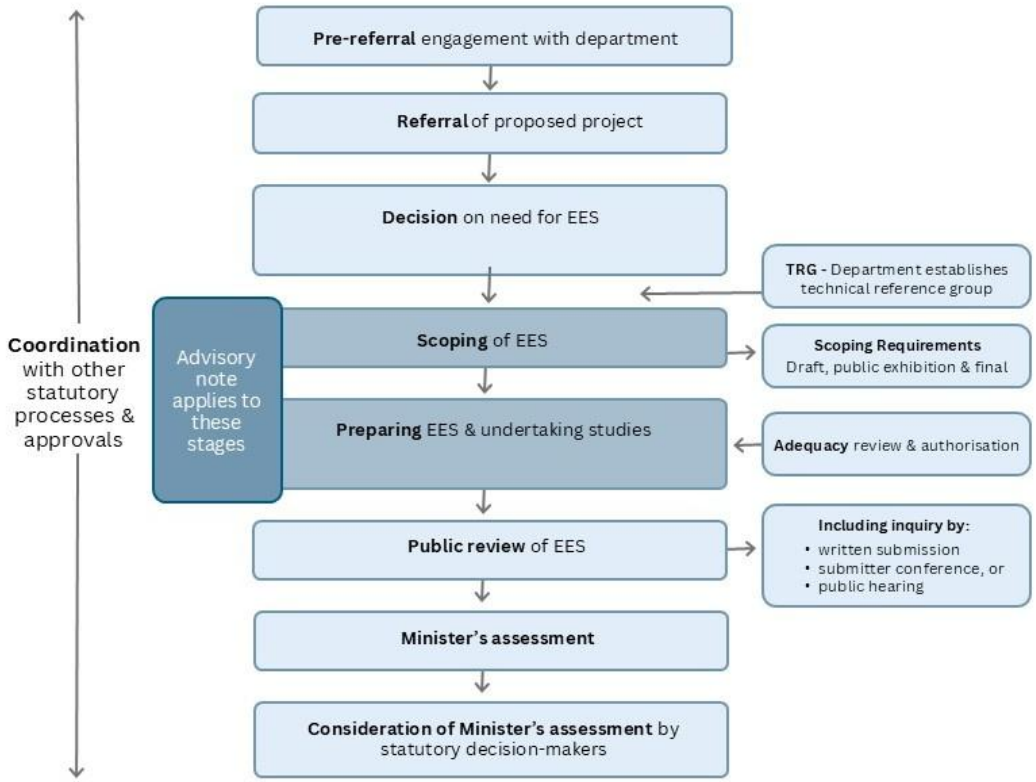


*Figure 1. Overview of EES process and where this advisory note applies.*

## 2.2. Supporting tools and templates for each stage of the EES process

This advisory note outlines the scoping and preparation stages of an EES as they relate to proponents. While primarily intended for these stages, proponents are encouraged to review this advisory note at the referral stage to gain a comprehensive understanding of the entire EES process. Additional resources available to help a proponent with each stage of the EES process – the current advisory note and tools are listed below. Further guidance is also provided when interacting with the Environment Assessment System, please take time to read the Before You Start guidance to help inform what is required.

### 2.2.1. Pre-referral and referral

- *Pre-referral and Referral Advisory Note*
- *Referral Form*

### 2.2.2. Scoping

- *EES Commencement and Scoping Advisory Note*
- *Preparing an EES Consultation Plan Advisory Note*
- *EES Study Program Preparation Advisory Note*

### 2.2.3. Preparing EES

- *Peer Review and Quality Assurance for Environment Effects Statements Advisory Note*

# 3. Roles and responsibilities in the EES Process

## 3.1. The proponent

The proponent is responsible for preparing the EES and ensuring it responds to the scope and is of sufficient quality. The proponent is expected to:

- Establish a team with the capabilities, experience and expertise needed to prepare the EES and undertake the necessary technical assessments.
- Develop constructive working relationships with the IAU team and relevant government agencies.
- Prepare EES commencement documentation (Section 5).
- Establish, manage and track EES development and TRG review schedules.
- Implement stakeholder engagement activities in accordance with the EES Consultation Plan.
- Coordinate the preparation of technical assessments and an EES main report that adequately meets the scoping requirements.
- Proactively engage with the IAU.
- Work constructively and respectfully with TRG agencies in accordance with the *TRG Advisory Note (soon to be released)*.
- Prepare the EES documentation for exhibition that meets the scoping requirements.

## 3.2. Impact Assessment Unit

The IAU administers the EES process and, when relevant, coordinates it with other statutory approvals. The IAU is expected to:

- Coordinate and administer the EES process.
- Nominate a Project Manager as the IAU representative for the project.
- Engage with and support the proponent and have regular coordination meetings.
- Chair and facilitate TRG meetings and maintain a record of agreed actions.

Support proponent engagement and communication with TRG agencies and facilitate resolution of agency comments and feedback. Refer to the soon to be released TRG Advisory Note for further information on the IAU's responsibilities regarding the TRG.

## 3.3. TRG agencies

TRG agencies provide advice to the IAU and proponent during EES scoping and preparation stages. The advice includes what the EES should address, whether technical studies are adequate in terms of consistency with good practice, technical standards of method and analysis, and any relevant legislation, regulation, and policy relevant to the proposed project. The expectations of the TRG agencies are described in the soon to be released *TRG Advisory Note*.

## 4. Key elements of a good EES and proponent

Before starting the EES process, the proponent should consider the following key elements to establishing a strong foundation for developing a robust and effective EES.

**Capability and capacity:**

- Build a capable, agile team with the right expertise and experience.
- Engage consultants who understand the EES process if expertise and experience is unavailable internally.
- The team would typically have or be led by a consultant with experience in environmental impact assessment and expertise relevant to the matters being examined in the EES. See EIANZ Guideline, *Engaging an environmental consultant for impact assessment* for further information.
- Prepare an achievable, efficient schedule for development, review and completion of the EES and ensure the agreed deadlines can be met.
- Ensure enough resources are available to support development of the EES in line with the project schedule.

**Project description:**

- Develop a clear description of the project that includes information on all project components (including offsite components required to develop the project), location, potential staging of the project, and, where relevant, construction, operations, rehabilitation and decommissioning activities.
- Document the process for developing the preferred form of the project including how the preferred project design was selected.
- Describe relevant project alternatives that are retained for comparative assessment in the EES.
- Keep the project description flexible so it can evolve in response to constraints identified throughout the EES process, while ensuring the project description includes sufficient detail to clearly explain impact pathways and enable a robust assessment.

**Understanding effects and relevant approvals:**

- Early in the EES process identify the key potential significant effects from the proposed project and determine, in consultation with the TRG, what information and studies are required to assess these effects.
- Conduct fit-for-purpose studies to establish the baseline environmental conditions and assess the significance of the residual effects. The depth and approach adopted for each study should be proportionate to environment risk.
- Understand what information is required to inform the Minister's assessment and key matters identified in relevant statutory applications and approval decisions at the conclusion of the EES process.

**Early engagement and consultation:**

- Engage early and meaningfully with Traditional Owners.
- Engage early with stakeholders and the community to get input on the project, local knowledge, study design, and EES methods.
- Build constructive relationships with the IAU, TRG, government agencies, and regulators.
- Facilitate meaningful engagement with non-government stakeholders.

**Ways of working:**

- Facilitate alignment between participants in EES development through proactive engagement.
- Plan and coordinate activities to ensure participants can provide input in a timely manner.
- Work collaboratively with regulators and technical specialists to find solutions to EES issues.
- Use the facilitation and advice provided by DTP-IAU to support problem-solving and targeted engagement with relevant agencies.
- Communicate clearly and consistently to enable participants to contribute effectively to EES development.

# 5. Scoping

Scoping is an important stage that occurs prior to preparing an EES. It guides the development of the EES by clearly setting out what matters need to be addressed. A summary of the process is provided in this section, further details can also be found in the Ministerial Guidelines and relevant advisory notes.

## 5.1. Pre-commencement meeting and commencement documents

Following a decision by the Minister for Planning that an EES is required, the status of the project will change in the Environment Assessment System, and the proponent will receive an email with links to required commencement documents and guidance to begin the EES process, including:

- Draft EES consultation plan.
- Preliminary list of stakeholder issues.
- Draft study program.
- Draft EES project schedule.
- Draft TRG review and meeting schedule.

The proponent can begin preparing this information as soon as the Minister has issued a decision that an EES is required. Guidance on what is required and how to complete the information is provided on the department website *EES Commencement and Scoping* and *Preparing an EES Consultation Plan.*

Before submitting the above information, an EES pre-commencement meeting needs to be held with the IAU to clarify the information needed, when to submit it, and how it supports the development of draft scoping requirements. To prepare for the pre-commencement meeting, the proponent should have a general outline of the above documents for discussion with the IAU. To request a pre-commencement meeting, the proponent will be required to complete and submit a request form in the Environment Assessment System.

## 5.2. EES Study program and EES consultation plan

A key part of scoping is the proponent's **EES study program**. This is a key step towards identifying and prioritising issues for assessment in the EES. It informs the development of scoping requirements by the IAU, allowing them to be tailored to focus on the potentially significant environmental effects of the project, while avoiding unnecessary assessment of other matters that clearly have a low potential for significant environmental effects.

To support this, the IAU has developed a study program template to help proponents prepare adequate study programs. The study program typically involves an initial risk screening to prioritise issues for assessment and outlines the proposed technical studies and associated methods to assess the potentially significant environmental effects.

The proponent will also need to prepare a **draft EES consultation plan** at the same time. This helps characterise public and stakeholders' interests, concerns and engagement needs, local knowledge and inputs. It also outlines how public and stakeholder inputs will be recorded, considered and addressed in the preparation of the EES. A final EES consultation plan will be placed on the DTP website to provide the community with information about consultation and engagement activities proposed during the EES process and timing of these. The plan also needs to outline how the proponent will respond to feedback received during these proposed activities.

For guidance, refer to:

- *EES Commencement and Scoping Advisory Note*
- *EES Study Program Preparation Advisory Note*
- *Preparing an EES Consultation Plan Advisory Note*

## 5.3. Scoping requirements

The IAU will draft the scoping requirements based on an adequate draft study program from the proponent for the EES.

1) Adequate draft study program
    a) The proponent will be able to submit the commencement documents, including the draft study program, to the Environment Assessment System following the pre-commencement meeting with the IAU.
    b) The IAU will review the commencement documents and provide feedback on any gaps or updates to address, for the document to be considered an adequate standard for circulation to the TRG.
    c) The TRG will review the draft study program, provide advice on relevant guidelines, methods, and available data. The TRG will review the working draft scoping requirements at the same time.
    d) The proponent will make updates to the draft study program based on the feedback provided by the IAU and/or the TRG, if required. The updated version of the study program is to respond to the advice and comments from IAU and TRG agencies.
    e) The proponent will need to upload an updated version of the document to the Environment Assessment System.
2) Draft scoping requirements
    a) Once the draft study program is accepted as adequate, IAU will progress completion of the draft scoping requirements as described in the Ministerial Guidelines.

## 5.4. Assessment framework

An assessment framework should be established to ensure a transparent and consistent method for an integrated assessment of potential environmental effects arising from the project across all assessment topics. The assessment framework typically outlines the approach to:

- Establish baseline conditions to enable assessment of predicted changes due to the project.
- Characterise potential direct and indirect environmental effects associated with identified changes in terms of extent, magnitude, and duration.
- Apply assessment criteria to determine the significance of the identified effects.
- Manage performance through avoidance, minimisation, and mitigation of potential environmental effects.
- Manage uncertainty.
- Assess cumulative effects.
- Assess residual effects following the implementation of mitigation measures.

Specialists undertaking assessments for the project should generally apply the assessment framework consistently, although there may be some variations depending on assessment topics where specific assessment approaches are prescribed (e.g. human health risk assessment).

## 5.5. Interpreting and responding to scoping requirements

In preparing the EES, it is essential that the scope and depth of any investigations undertaken by the proponent are proportionate to the level of risk and potential significance of the environmental effect being examined. This risk-based approach/ principle is articulated in the Ministerial Guidelines (p. 9) and is central to ensuring that the EES is both effective and importantly efficient and focused, reducing unnecessary cost, time and content/details for environmental matters that do not warrant it.

A risk-based approach should help guide the proponent on the right, proportionate design of each study method/ approach undertaken to inform the EES' assessment of that matter(s). The scoping requirements are structured to support this proportionate approach to assessment. They identify potentially significant effects

and categorise them according to priority level. This tiered structure is intended to assist the proponent (in consultation with the IAU and the TRG agencies), to tailor the assessment, and focus on the potentially significant environmental effects and priority matters which are most important for the EES and subsequent decision-making. The priority levels, and the types of assessment expected are described in **Table 1.**

The scoping requirements outline what assessments are required, while the proponent's study program sets out how those assessments will be conducted. It is essential that proponents consult with TRG agencies on their expectations for assessment methods to ensure alignment before commencing any assessments.

*Table 1. Examples of assessments categorisation*

| Categorisation | Definition of matter | Indicative assessment approach |
|---|---|---|
| **High priority** | Matters with the **greatest potential for significant environmental effects**. These are central to the reasons for an EES decision and statutory decision-making. These may be State significant and involve complex interactions across systems. | Typically, a rigorous assessment is required to encompass baseline studies, seasonal and targeted field surveys, predictive modelling, in depth stakeholder engagement, cumulative impact analysis, and offset planning. Assessment must be robust enough to inform the Minister's Assessment. |
| **Priority** | Matters with **potential for significant environmental effects**, or those that may influence high priority matters. These may be regionally significant or relevant to specific approvals. | Focused studies typically addressing discrete risks, supported by desktop analysis, targeted fieldwork, and consultation where relevant. Assessment should be sufficient to inform mitigation measures and statutory requirements. |
| **Other matters** | **Lower risk matters with primarily localised effects. These are relevant to statutory approvals but are unlikely to result in significant environmental effects.**<br>**While these matters may not directly relate to significant effects, they remain important for the integrated assessment of effects.** | **Standard environmental management can be applied with minimal technical analysis. Typically addressed through mitigation and monitoring measures outlined in the Environmental Management Framework (EMF), including contingency planning and compliance with existing standards and guidelines.** |

## 5.6. Guidance on technical study methods

Applying the risk-based approach EES studies requires the proponent to draw on best-practice guidance to inform the assessment methods and ensure that each study is proportionate to risk. While it is up to the proponent to develop their study methods, it is important to seek advice from TRG agencies on their expectations, as well as established and best-practice guidelines and standards.

Study methods which may be relevant to seek guidance on include:

- Field surveys and data collection to characterise baseline conditions.
- Development, validation, and use of predictive computational models.
- Spatial analysis using geographic information systems.
- Statistical and uncertainty analysis.
- Approach to assessing the significance of impacts.

### 5.7. Impact assessment resources

Useful resources that may be considered by the proponent (at the time of publishing) for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Cumulative Impact Assessment (CIA) and Social Impact Assessment (SIA) are provided below. It is recommended that consultation is undertaken with the IAU to identify potential guidelines that may be suitable for consideration by the proponent. Alongside the guidance below, TRG agencies often bring valuable impact assessment experience that proponents can draw upon.

**Environmental impact assessment**

- *EIANZ Guidelines for Impact Assessment*

**Cumulative impact assessment**

- *NSW Cumulative Impact Assessment Guidelines*
- *UK Government Cumulative Effects Assessment Guidelines*

**Social impact assessment**

- *NSW Social Impact Assessment Guidelines*
- *Queensland Social Impact Assessment Guidelines*

## 6. Preparing the EES

### 6.1. Managing the EES Schedule

Before the first TRG meeting can occur, the proponent needs to provide a proposed EES schedule for all activities in the study program which should be updated in consultation with the IAU. The Ministerial Guidelines (page 29) outline what the schedule should include, and this is reflected in the EES schedule template provided to the proponent following the Minister's EES decision. The EES schedule will include the following:

- Scoping.
- Draft EES preparation, review, and finalisation.
- EES submission for authorisation.
- EES exhibition and public review (including inquiry).
- Preparation of Minister's assessment.

The schedule is submitted with the commencement documents for review by the IAU.

The schedule should reflect a realistic timeframe for the proponent's capacity to deliver the EES and complete the required studies. The proponent should establish protocols for notifying of delays and updating the schedule in consultation with the IAU and the TRG. Proponents are expected to ensure that an up-to-date version of the schedule is maintained on the Environment Assessment System. Changes to schedule should also be discussed with the IAU at coordination meetings prior to uploading updated versions.

## 6.2. Engagement with TRG agencies

To support the proponent during the development of an EES, IAU establishes a TRG. Effective and focused engagement with the TRG agencies is important and includes tailored meetings and a site visit, if relevant. An outline of these activities is provided in this section.

### 6.2.1. Preparation for meetings and commencement documentation

To support the establishment of the TRG and commencement of the process, the proponent needs to submit the EES commencement documentation. This includes the proposed TRG meeting and review schedule which sets out when TRG meetings are expected, and which agencies should attend which meetings, based on the technical content to be discussed. For details on TRG meeting types and preparation for TRG meetings, refer to the *Technical Reference Group (TRG) Advisory Note (soon to be released).*

### 6.2.2. Preparation for TRG site visit

The TRG site visit is an opportunity for interactive engagement with TRG agencies and helps build a shared understanding of the project, the site and surrounding area. It is most effective once the proponent has developed a preliminary concept design and identified the locations of key project components and areas of environmental sensitivity.

In preparation for the site visit, the proponent should:

- Draft and circulate a proposed itinerary to the IAU and the TRG for input.
- Provide maps showing proposed project components and sensitive environmental areas.
- Coordinate logistics, including transport, safety, accessibility, catering, and navigation aids.
- Identify key contact personnel for the visit.
- Ensure safety plans and communication protocols are in place and that the IAU and TRG are aware of what personal protective equipment (PPE) is required.

### 6.2.3. Communication and issue resolution

Proponents should engage early and proactively with TRG agencies during EES preparation. This helps clarify expectations early and inform fit-for-purpose approaches to assessing/ address any requirements or issues raised. This also helps ensure more efficient and focused TRG meetings and document reviews during the EES process.

While not every issue will be resolved or agreed upon, the proponent needs to do the following prior to commencing adequacy review:

- Actively engage with the relevant agency to work through issues, with support from IAU, and
- Provide clear justification where there is a difference in opinion and advice from an agency has not been adopted.

Further details on the IAU's expectations for proponents are outlined in the *Technical Reference Group (TRG) Advisory Note.* At the appropriate stage, the IAU will provide proponents with additional guidance on the protocol for managing and addressing TRG comments.

## 6.3. Structure and format of the EES main report

The Ministerial Guidelines (p. 25-28) provide an overview of what should be included in an EES, which will help inform the content and structure of the EES main report.

Typically, an EES will comprise a main EES report, technical appendices and an EES summary document.

Proponents rely upon specialist studies, investigations and analyses that provide the basis for the EES main report. These are usually referred to as EES technical appendices, appended to the EES main report. Proponents commission specialist studies where appropriate to assess potentially significant effects and to recommend measures to avoid, reduce, or manage them. While some studies can be detailed and very technical, they should be proportionate to the level of risk for that environmental matter. They are used by the proponent to understand potential impacts and inform the content of the EES main report. The EES main report should present the studies key findings in a clear, concise and accessible way, so that the community and broader stakeholders can understand the potential impacts and proposed mitigation measures without needing to refer to the technical appendices. At the same time, clear referencing to the technical appendices is important for those that do want to understand the specialist studies undertaken to underpin the EES.

The EES main report is to be an well integrated, concise, clear, objective, plain English document that provides a proportionate response to the matters set out in scoping requirements for the EES, including clearly describing the proposed form of the project, its predicted environmental effects, focusing on potentially significant effects , as well as proposed environment management or performance requirements.  It should clearly identify where components of the scope are being addressed and the commitments of the proponent.

Both the main report and the specialist studies (as technical appendices) are exhibited for public comment, along with any relevant statutory approval applications that the proponent has decided to integrate with the EES process.

#### 6.3.1. Table of contents

Proponents should prepare a draft Table of Contents (TOC) for the EES main report early in the process in consultation with the IAU. The EES will typically include the standard sections outlined in **Attachment A** of this advisory note. In addition, the impact assessment chapters should be guided by the scoping requirements for the project.

#### 6.3.2. Digital EES formats

The EES should be prepared by digital means, to be readily downloadable from the proponent's website, and can be made available in a web-based interactive version (to the satisfaction of the Minister). If necessary, the department can also specify the proponent place a limited number of hard copies of the EES at specified locations, and/or make copies available for purchase at request.

Increasingly, proponents are adopting digital platforms to present EES information in a more interactive, sophisticated and user-friendly way. A fully digital EES can improve accessibility by allowing stakeholders to navigate content intuitively, view maps and visualisations, and access summaries without downloading large documents. For example, the Suburban Rail Loop EES used a fully digital format to enhance engagement and transparency. While the statutory requirements for content remain the same, proponents should consider whether a digital EES approach could complement the traditional PDF report and improve community understanding.

### 6.4. Preparing a robust and technically sound EES

There are several ways for a proponent to help ensure they are implementing quality assurance and working towards an EES that is technically sound and robust. This is in addition to using the advice of the agencies and IAU on the TRG. Below are key approaches that a proponent can use help to improve the quality, credibility and clarity of assessments.

#### 6.4.1. Peer reviews

As set out in the *Ministerial Guidelines*, the proponent should adopt internal quality assurance QA procedures to help ensure that they complete an EES that is adequate for exhibition, presenting a clear understanding of

the project and its likely effects, in particular the potentially significant effects. A proponent's QA can entail internal reviews, which should focus on the clarity and completeness of the content of reports, to ensure that the output is of a suitable quality for issue, and fit-for-purpose. Refer to the *Peer Review and Quality Assurance for Environment Effects Statements Advisory Note* for further information.

It can also be prudent for a proponent to initiate their own **internal or external technical peer reviews** of some key or more complex technical reports. A peer review is a technical review undertaken to verify that investigation and assessment methods are suitable and meet best practice environmental assessment and are consistent with the body of technical knowledge in the subject area. These can be taken by specialist peers from within or external to an organisation.

In the context of an EES, a peer review typically verifies that work is technically sound, conclusions are supported and clearly covers the relevant matters identified in the scoping requirements and Ministerial Guidelines. This will include reviewing whether it is based on appropriate data, has adopted suitable methods for assessment and that conclusions are supported by the work presented.

The proponent should identify where and how they intend to utilise peer review within the draft Study Program during the EES scoping stage. Topics that may warrant peer review are those that examine significant effects/ risks, or involve new or emerging areas of science, or are complex, involving non-standard modelling, or have significant uncertainties that are not readily quantifiable or where available guidance is limited. Peer reviews can provide proponent and other key stakeholders (such as a key regulator or agency) with assurance regarding the technical veracity of assessments in these situations.

Peer reviewers are typically engaged by the proponent and should have sufficient technical expertise in the topic for which the peer review is to be undertaken. It is important that peer reviews can be documented and presented to relevant stakeholders, to help the proponent show how authors of the technical studies have addressed issues raised.

Proponents should discuss the timing of any peer review with the IAU prior to commissioning.

For more information on how proponent can use peer reviewers and other types of peer review, please refer to the *Peer Review and Quality Assurance for Environment Effects Statements Advisory Note*.

### 6.4.2. TRG Focus Meetings

TRG Focus Meetings are a new method of focusing engagement with TRG agencies to assist proponents with preparation of their EES. This is one of the meeting types within the new TRG engagement model. They provide a structured, but focused forum to discuss significant topics during EES development. It could involve topics where issues attract strong community interest or involve non-standard methods. These meetings are intended to help the proponent clarify or verify technical approaches, modelling, or data to support assessment and reporting, with the key agencies that can provide that advice.

TRG Focus Meetings are generally arranged by the proponent in consultation with the IAU and may include participants from any combination of the proponent, the IAU, specialists preparing technical reports, TRG agencies (including their subject matter experts), and peer reviewers.

To enable flexible and constructive engagement, the proponent needs to submit an agenda and specific questions to the IAU at least 10 business days prior to the meeting. For more detail on TRG Focus Meetings and other meeting types, refer to the *Technical Reference Group (TRG) Advisory Note (soon to be released).*

## 6.5. Content requirements and accessibility

The proponent should prepare the EES main report, so it is understandable to a layperson, not just technical experts. It must be clear, well-structured, and written in plain English, as outlined on page 28 of the Ministerial Guidelines.

The main report should use plain language and short sentences throughout. Plain language means writing that is direct and simple and avoids unnecessary complexity, difficult words, and technical jargon.

The EES must also meet government standards for writing and accessibility. This includes ensuring the content is accessible to people with diverse needs, such as those using screen readers or those who speak English as a second language.

To learn more about writing and accessibility, visit:

1. *Standards for accessible content*
2. *Victorian Government style guide*
3. *How to make content accessible*

## 6.6. EES summary document

As outlined on page 28 of the Ministerial Guidelines, the proponent needs to prepare an EES summary document to exhibit as part of the EES in addition to the EES main report.

An EES summary document is a concise, non-technical, and visually engaging overview of a proposed project, its potential environmental effects, and the measures to manage those effects. Its purpose is to inform the public about the proposal, explain how to access the full EES and related documents, and outline the process for making submissions and participating in the inquiry. It should be clear, use plain language and graphics, and have a logical structure.

Unlike an executive summary, which is typically included within the EES main report and more technical in nature, the EES summary document is a standalone communication tool designed for a general audience, to draw attention to the EES exhibition and where to find additional information in the EES rather than provide detailed analysis.

## 6.7. Quality assurance (QA)

The proponent is responsible for ensuring the EES meets the minimum quality standards, focused on the key issues in accordance with the scoping requirements. The proponent should adopt internal QA procedures to help ensure that they complete an EES that is adequate for exhibition, presenting a clear understanding of the project and its likely effects.

QA is conducted within an organisation, in-line with procedures typically documented in a QA system or process (possibly an accredited quality management system), to ensure that the output is of a suitable quality for issue, and fit-for-purpose. Internal QA should focus on the clarity and completeness of the content of a document.

The proponent needs to undertake a thorough QA check before an EES document is completed and submitted, to identify and correct any editorial, formatting, or consistency errors. For example, this should occur before submission of a document for TRG agency review and for adequacy reviews. The QA review should consider the following, described in **Table 2**.

*Table 2. Quality assurance considerations for the EES main report*

| Category | Quality assurance considerations |
|---|---|
| **Presentation** | – Maintain consistent formatting throughout the entire document.<br>– Number all pages correctly.<br>– Where applicable, incorporate visual elements such as maps, diagrams, images, perspectives, or artist renderings to enhance reader comprehension.<br>– Present all figures and diagrams at an appropriate scale and resolution, ensure they are clearly labelled, and include relevant legends and scales. |
| **Navigation and structure** | – Hyperlink table of contents, figures, and tables within the document and appendices.<br>– Ensure headers and footers contain information on the relevant page, chapter, or section.<br>– Use clear and descriptive headings as much as possible to signpost and break up text.<br>– Ensure a logical flow of information.<br>– Reference all sources of information are appropriately. |
| **Writing clarity** | – Write clearly and succinctly.<br>– Use plain English suitable for a broad non-technical audience.<br>– Align with the Victorian Government style guide.<br>– Meet the Victorian Government standards for accessibility.<br>– Avoid unnecessary duplication of text by using cross-referencing.<br>– Provide objective and well-integrated analysis of effects.<br>– Clearly state assumptions.<br>– Ensure conclusions follow logically from the data. |
| **Consistency** | – Use consistent units of measurement.<br>– Apply terminology and abbreviations uniformly. |

## 6.8. EES adequacy and authorisation for exhibition

The *Ministerial Guidelines* (p. 29) outline three key steps to help the proponent prepare the EES for public exhibition:

1. *the proponent should adopt internal quality assurance procedures.*
2. *the proponent should clearly respond to TRG reviews and advice.*
3. *the proponent should engage with the department on the adequacy of the final proposed EES and seek authorisation from the Minister to exhibit for public comment.*

### 6.8.1. Adequacy review

It is the proponent's responsibility to prepare an EES that is adequate for exhibition. To help ensure the adequacy of an EES for exhibition it is important the proponent has worked with DTP-IAU and key agencies to:

1. sufficiently address the matters in the scoping requirements.
2. clearly respond to TRG technical reviews and advice.
3. implement good internal quality assurance procedures.

**Attachment B** of this advisory note lists some key considerations for adequacy review to help guide the proponent's internal review of the completed draft EES. To support efficient review processes, documents can be submitted for adequacy review in batches, subject to establishing an agreed, staged approach with IAU. An agreed schedule must be established, prior to commencing adequacy review, including confirmation of which documents will be included in each batch.

When undertaking adequacy review of the EES, the IAU checks:

- The quality and completeness of the documents.
- Whether the EES documents address the scoping requirements.
- Whether potentially significant environmental effects have been adequately assessed and adequate measures proposed to avoid and minimise effects.
- Whether critical comments from TRG agencies have been resolved.

The IAU will accept EES documents for adequacy review after the proponent has worked to resolve all high priority issues raised by the relevant TRG agencies for those documents. It may not be necessary to accept or take account of every comment from agencies. However, the proponent needs to provide clear justification and commentary, in particular where any clear difference(s) of opinion exist with that agency. The IAU is able to help facilitate this targeted engagement with the relevant agency as a part of EES preparation.

During adequacy review, the IAU will consider any unresolved key comments from TRG agencies and the proponent's response. In some cases, the IAU may ask the proponent to address certain key issues before resubmitting the documents for authorisation review. Proponents are encouraged to proactively meet with the IAU (and any relevant agencies) to discuss any outstanding comments from adequacy review and how they propose to respond prior to submitting EES documents for authorisation to exhibit.

### 6.8.2. Authorisation for exhibition

Once the adequacy review is complete, the authorisation process occurs. This step involves confirming the EES documents are complete, clear, and ready for public exhibition. Because EES documents are integrated documents, authorisation can only commence when the full draft EES has completed adequacy review. Please ensure all changes from the adequacy review stage are clearly shown (using track changes) and incorporated into the documents submitted for authorisation.

To request authorisation to exhibit from the Minister, the proponent must send a letter to the Minister for Planning accompanied by a digital/ electronic version of the final EES for exhibition. The IAU will concurrently brief the Minister on the adequacy of the EES for exhibition and public comment under the Act.

Authorisation is a final check of the EES against the scoping requirements, in the context of the remaining issues from the adequacy review stage. Once satisfied that the scoping requirements have been addressed, the Minister for Planning (or delegate) will be briefed to consider approval of EES exhibition under Section 9(2) of the *Environment Effects Act*.

Following authorisation, the proponent is responsible for giving public notice of the EES exhibition and inviting submissions on the environmental effects of the proposed project. Ideally, the proponent's EES related public engagement should have begun well ahead of exhibition, making people aware of that it is forthcoming and

what might be needed to prepare for that. If advertising coincides with statutory approval applications, joint advertising will be coordinated with the EES exhibition/ notice.

IAU will liaise with the proponent and Planning Panels Victoria on the final form and content of the proponent's exhibition materials and confirm exhibition dates. Management of the exhibition process, collection of submissions, and the Inquiry process is facilitated by Planning Panels Victoria.

# 7. Attachments

## Attachment A - EES suggested structure

| No. | Section | Typical information included |
|---|---|---|
| | **EES Summary Document** | |
| | | Refer to section 6.5 for information on what a summary document is. A summary document typically includes:<br>– Proponent details – who is proposing the project.<br>– Project description and rationale – what the proposal is and why it is needed.<br>– Alternatives considered – how the proposed option was selected/refined.<br>– Environmental setting – geography and sensitivities.<br>– Potential environmental effects – key effects.<br>– Mitigation measures – how effects will be managed and refined.<br>– Residual effects – why they are considered acceptable.<br>– Statutory approvals required – and any coordination with EES exhibition.<br>– Access to full EES documents – locations, online links, hard copies.<br>– Submission process – how to make a formal submission.<br>– Inquiry and assessment process – what happens after exhibition and rights to be heard. |
| | **EES Main Report** | |
| | Executive Summary | |
| | Table of Contents | |
| | Glossary and abbreviations | |
| **Part 1 - Project Overview: Understanding the project** | | |
| **1** | Introduction | |
| **2** | Project rationale | – Include information on project rationale and associated project objectives. |
| **3** | Project development and alternatives | A project alternatives chapter will typically:<br>– Identify and describe feasible alternatives to the proposed project and project design development. The project alternatives should be clearly outlined and detailed enough |

| No. | Section | Typical information included |
|---|---|---|
| | | to allow for meaningful comparison with the proposed project components.<br>– Include a 'no project' alternative. This should be presented with sufficient detail to describe the current and anticipated conditions if the project does not proceed, as a baseline for describing the project's potential environmental effects.<br>– Describe the screening process used to evaluate and compare the alternative options.<br>– Provide a clear justification for the selection of the preferred option(s), explaining why they were chosen over other alternatives. |
| **4** | Project description | – Describe location, technology, and design of project components (including essential offsite components).<br>– Provide legible and scaled diagrams, plans, or maps of the intended project.<br>– Site description information including:<br>  – Site characteristics with focus on natural and built environment.<br>  – The surrounding area, i.e. geographic setting, existing land use.<br>  – Communities, properties, and/or residences that may be affected are described.<br>– Describe the proposed method for implementing the project, including construction, operation and, where relevant, rehabilitation and decommissioning.<br>– Include details on the proposed program and time schedule for project implementation. This should include timing for key milestones and any project phasing. |
| **5** | Legislative framework | – Identify all environmental and planning approvals that are required, or likely to be required, for the project to be developed.<br>– Clearly state what component(s) of the project/ works triggers the need for an approval.<br>– Identify the objectives of relevant State and Commonwealth legislation, policies, strategies, and guidelines and EES scoping requirements and include what implications these have had for design and development of the project.<br>– Outline what implications the above legislation / policies/ strategies/ guidelines have. |
| **6** | EES assessment framework | – Describe the framework that will be used to structure the assessment of potential significant environmental effects with regards to the following:<br>  – Local, state and commonwealth legislation, policy, and strategies. |

| No. | Section | Typical information included |
|---|---|---|
| | | – EES scoping requirements.<br>– Project objectives and performance criteria established by the proponent for the project to guide assessment of, and benchmark, the likely environment effects.<br>– Use of relevant databases, field work, modelling, and assessment methods.<br>– Relationship between different effects.<br>– Describe how any risk screening was used to prioritise issues for assessment.<br>– Describe the impact assessment framework and how it was applied in the various technical studies. |
| **7** | Communication and engagement | – Outlines the Traditional Owners and key project stakeholders, their respective interests in the project and how groupings of stakeholders were determined.<br>– Highlights the engagement objectives and briefly describes how the process has been undertaken (methods, materials, and tools) including approaches specific for Traditional Owner engagement.<br>– Describes engagement approaches and methods applied, including any phasing and reasons for this.<br>– Provides a summary of issues raised to date in engagement and how/where they have been responded to in the EES, including matters raised by Traditional Owners.<br>– Describes future communication and engagement, including during the remaining stages of the EES process any that will occur beyond completion of the EES process. |
| **Part 2 - Environmental assessment chapters** | | Assessments required for an EES vary by the project and scoping requirements. The environmental assessment chapters draw on key information from the technical reports to present key findings on the significance of the project's residual environmental effects and proposed mitigation measures that the proponent is committing to adopt. Each of these chapters should include a summary of potential cumulative effects or alternatively a separate cumulative effects chapter can be prepared. |
| **Part 3 - Environmental management framework** | | |
| **22** | Environmental management framework | – Identify proposed environmental indicators and objectives for key environmental effects and consider the effectiveness of the proposed mitigation measures.<br>– Detail the environmental mitigation measures to mitigate significant environmental effects or enhance performance.<br>– Outline the framework for managing environmental effects and/or the management system that will be adopted is |

| No. | Section | Typical information included |
|---|---|---|
| | | described, including organisational responsibilities and accountabilities for environmental management.<br>– Provide an overview of environmental management plans.<br>– Provide an overview of an environmental management auditing and reporting performance program.<br>– Provide details on monitoring requirements that will apply.<br>– Provide information on arrangements for management of and access to baseline and monitoring data. |
| **23** | Conclusion | |
| **24** | **References** | |
| | **Attachments** | |
| | **Technical reports/ appendices** | |

## Attachment B - Adequacy review considerations

| Aspect | Typical considerations |
|---|---|
| **1. Proponent's internal quality assurance** | – Quality assurance review needs to be completed (see **Quality assurance** section).<br>– Draft EES main report is well-structured, with clear and logical flow and well-linked content.<br>– Analysis is objective and there is clear rationale for findings and conclusions.<br>– Assessment of potential effects is integrated where appropriate, using system-based approach.<br>– Clear presentation of adopted avoidance, mitigation, and management measures, and their expected effectiveness.<br>– Data and findings are consistent across reports and chapters.<br>– Language used in draft EES main report is clear, accessible and succinct.<br>– Includes relevant visual aids (e.g. maps, charts, diagrams, photos), to help reduce length of document and present information clearly to all readers. |
| **2. Complete project information** | – Project description includes rationale, objectives, location, site maps, technology, design, lifecycle (construction, operation, decommissioning), timelines, and delivery strategy.<br>– Site description covers characteristics, setting (environment and land use), and affected communities.<br>– Alternatives are identified and evaluated, including the 'no project' option, with justification for the preferred proposal.<br>– Design and development reflect relevant State and Commonwealth legislation, policies, strategies, guidelines, and scoping requirements.<br>– Statutory approvals and assessment framework are clearly outlined.<br>– Evaluation framework includes project objectives and performance criteria. |
| **3. Scoping requirements met** | – Scoping requirements have been adequately responded to.<br>– Include a table mapping each scoping requirement to the relevant EES section. |
| **4. Assessment of Potentially Significant Environmental Effects** | – **Types of environmental effects**<br>  – Considers relevant direct, indirect, and cumulative effects.<br>  – Includes assessment of priority potential environmental effects set out in the scoping requirements.<br>  – Provides sufficient information to identify and understand likely environmental effects set out in the scoping requirements.<br>– **Significance of potential effects**<br>  – Applies a risk-based approach to examining the significance of likely effects, using methods/ approaches that are proportionate to the level risk.<br>  – Describes change in values (magnitude, extent duration).<br>  – Assesses effectiveness of avoidance and mitigation measures, with the application of the mitigation hierarchy. |

| Aspect | Typical considerations |
|---|---|
| | – Describes significance of likely residual effects.<br>– Defines level of uncertainty and confidence in impact assessment predictions.<br>– **Integrated assessment of environmental effects**<br>– Assesses relationship between different effects.<br>– Describes the investigation approach, including use of relevant databases, fieldwork, modelling, and assessment methods.<br>– Uses best practice techniques and technologies in the assessment.<br>– Considers principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development.<br>– Presents clear, succinct, and objective analysis of the different potential effects and trade-offs for any relevant alternatives and preferred project design.<br>– **Consistency with relevant statutory provisions**<br>– Identifies responsibilities of local, State, Commonwealth Government.<br>– Outlines consistency with legislation, regulation, policy, strategy, guidelines, agreements, plans.<br>– **Mitigation/ management of effects**<br>– Describes proposed avoidance, mitigation, and management measures, including residual effects.<br>– Describes indicators/ objectives to guide monitoring/ management actions.<br>– Outlines the environmental management framework or system, including organisational responsibilities and accountabilities.<br>– Details program for evaluating outcomes and auditing performance. |
| **5. Level of detail and depth of assessment information is adequate for the level of risk for each matter** | – Provides sufficient information to enable assessment of priority matters/ issues/ risks, with proportionate, fit-for-purpose approaches, where depth of investigation and detail is commensurate with risk.<br>– Lower risk matters can be readily documented and not need in depth examination and not further explored after EES is completed / exhibition. |
| **6. Resolution of TRG agency comments** | – High priority issues raised by the TRG agencies which are material to potentially significant effects and the scope set for the EES need to be addressed.<br>– Documents for adequacy review should not be submitted to IAU if there's not already been work by the proponent to resolve the high priority issues.<br>– See Communication and issue resolution section for further guidance. |


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