



Seizing the Opportunity: Delivering Better Outcomes from Regulatory Reform

Symposium sub-themes

Note: We are likely to receive more abstracts than we can accommodate in the program. Priority will be given to abstracts that present truly innovative practice and/or provide valuable learnings or tools for other practitioners who will attend the symposium.

Sub theme 1 – Achieving efficient, high-quality assessments and approvals under the new streamlined assessment pathway and the reformed bilateral agreements

Procedure is crucial to Impact assessment (IA). Procedural effectiveness underpins legal compliance, timely delivery of high-quality assessment documentation and fairness to all participants. The EPBC reforms introduce significant procedural change, particularly through the new streamlined assessment pathway.

Abstracts are sought on how the reforms can be implemented to enhance, rather than compromise, procedural effectiveness. Topics could include, for example:

- Implications of the proposed 'front-loading' of the assessment process: How can proponents ensure the adequacy and rigour of assessments? Will community engagement be enhanced or left too late in the process?
- How to gain communication and transparency with regulators through pre-referral meetings and during the referral assessment for streamlined assessments.
- Bilateral assessments and approvals: How can bilateral assessments be made more efficient and effective? How can good environmental outcomes be assured through approval bilateral agreements?
- Maintaining assessment quality and transparency in a streamlined assessment
- Strengthening the link between assessment findings and clear, transparent and defensible approval decisions.

Sub Theme 2 – Using the reforms to drive innovation and quality in identifying and evaluating environmental and social impacts

At the core of IA is the identification and evaluation of impacts on environmental and social values, including determining their significance. Achieving both proportionality and high-quality assessment remains a persistent challenge across jurisdictions.

Abstracts are invited on how the EPBC reforms, and practice more broadly, can drive innovation and improve outcomes in impact identification and evaluation. Topics may include:

- Moving beyond the 'shopping list' approach to scoping
- Improving the identification and evaluation of impacts
- Addressing uncertainty in both qualitative and quantitative evaluations
- Advancing approaches to evaluating significance
- Strengthening engagement with First nations' peoples and other stakeholders when identifying and evaluating impacts
- Integrating traditional knowledge and other types of knowledge into IA
- The role of both statutory and non-statutory documents and quality control in improving practice, including National Environment Standards and Protection Statements.
- How can regulators help proponents with clearer guidance on what they expect?
- The role of peer review, independent audit, accreditation and regulatory oversight in lifting standards
- Skills, training and professional standards needed to deliver consistently high-quality IA.

Sub Theme 3 – Using the mitigation hierarchy to go beyond compliance

The mitigation hierarchy is central to achieving good outcomes in IA, with avoidance of impacts as the priority. However, the influence of IA on project design can be limited and occur too late to shape key decisions.

Abstracts are invited on how the EPBC reforms, and IA practice more broadly, can better embed the mitigation hierarchy and move beyond compliance to deliver improved environmental and social/community outcomes. Topics may include:

- Embedding mitigation thinking earlier in project planning and design
- Engaging with the community to inform project design and mitigation considerations
- The role of regulators in reinforcing the mitigation hierarchy in assessment and approval processes
- Ensuring alternatives analysis is robust within streamlined assessments
- How to manage a project and proponents so that restoration contributions remain as the last rung of the mitigation hierarchy for residual significant impacts
- Strengthening follow-up and monitoring to demonstrate the effectiveness of mitigation measures.

Sub theme 4 - Making effective use of regional planning

The EPBC reforms place a greater emphasis on regional planning to ensure good environmental and social outcomes at a landscape scale.

Abstracts are invited on how regional planning can be more effectively implemented and applied to improve impact assessment and decision-making.

Topics may include:

- How to effectively integrate project assessments and regional planning.
- Addressing cumulative impacts through regional and strategic approaches
- Improving alignment between Commonwealth, state and territory processes
- Lessons from existing regional planning initiatives
- Ensuring regional planning delivers tangible environmental outcomes.