

Social Impact Assessment

This fact sheet provides an overview of the new social impact assessment process being introduced under the Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025.

What are social impacts?

The social impacts of a development refer to the ways people and communities are affected by a development throughout its lifecycle. These impacts can include risks to safety, quality of life, as well as access to infrastructure, services, and facilities. Development can influence physical and mental well-being, social and economic stability, and even livelihoods, shaping how people live and work. Managing these impacts thoughtfully can help communities navigate both the challenges and benefits that arise from development in their community.

What is a social impact assessment?

Social impact assessment is a process that helps identify how a development might affect the people living and working nearby, both the positive and the negative. It ensures that local communities are meaningfully considered and that any potential negative impacts are managed and positive opportunities are enhanced. A social impact assessment will generally:

- identify, analyse and assess the social impacts of a development across identified key areas
- develop management measures to avoid and mitigate potentially significant negative impacts
- nominate strategies to monitor, review and update management measures throughout the project lifecycle – if relevant
- conclude in a social impact assessment report

What process is used to undertake social impact assessment?

In March 2018, the Office of the Coordinator General established a Social Impact Assessment (SIA Guideline). This existing SIA Guideline is currently used to guide social impact assessment in Queensland under the following legislation:

- *Strong and Sustainable Resource Communities Act 2017*
- *State Development and Public Works Organisation Act 1971*
- *Environmental Protection Act 1994*

It is proposed to amend this existing SIA Guideline to enable it to be applied as a statutory instrument under the *Planning Act 2016* (Planning Act), while also ensuring it remains fit-for-purpose as a guideline under existing legislation.

More information on the proposed changes to the SIA Guideline is provided in the Supporting instruments fact sheet.

Why is change required?

A consistent, state-wide approach to social impact assessment is proposed for all developments that have the potential for significant impacts in Queensland, including wind farm and large-scale solar farms under the Planning Act.

A consistent approach to the identification and understanding of social impacts will ensure that the needs, concerns, and well-being of affected communities are considered thoroughly throughout a project's lifecycle – regardless of the legislation under which the assessment is undertaken.

What is changing?

It is proposed to amend the Queensland planning framework to ensure proponents of wind farms and large-scale solar farms build social licence with their host communities in advance of a development application being lodged. Social impact assessment has been identified as an effective method to consult with communities and build social licence prior to regulatory approval processes.

Frontloading social impact assessment means that commitments made by the renewable energy sector to respond to social impacts will be formalised via a subsequent community benefit agreement. This will drive greater accountability of proponents, improved transparency of process and better delivery of tangible benefits for communities.

In summary, the proposed changes will:

- prioritise early and ongoing community engagement
- identify social impacts and opportunities
- support responsible development decisions
- build social licence by including local perspectives
- ensure host communities receive positive legacy benefits from development.

To achieve this objective the Planning Act will be amended to establish a new community benefit system in the Queensland planning framework comprised of two core components, a social impact assessment and a community benefit agreement. The social impact assessment will be used to inform the creation of a community benefit agreement.

Further information is provided in a separate fact sheet on community benefit agreements.

To apply the community benefit system to wind farms and large-scale solar farms it is proposed to amend the Planning Regulation 2017 (Planning Regulation). Further information on proposed changes to the Planning Regulation will be provided in a separate fact sheet on supporting instruments.

How does the new social impact assessment process work?

Under the Planning Act the social impact assessment process can be arranged into distinct phases. These various phases overlap and are most effective when applied across the project lifecycle.

Community and stakeholder engagement

A consultative and inclusive engagement program is to be established early in the social impact assessment process and is to consider the nature of the project and the needs of the different stakeholder groups. Community and stakeholder engagement is typically undertaken to:

- understand who is likely to be impacted and how
- understand the values and characteristics of potentially affected communities
- identify and assess potential social impacts
- inform the development of management measures to mitigate adverse impacts and enhance benefits
- support monitoring and reporting.

Scoping

The outcomes of the scoping phase will inform the baseline analysis, community and stakeholder engagement activities and impact assessment. Activities in the scoping phase typically includes:

- describing the project
- determining the regulatory context
- defining the study area, including identifying and profiling affected communities
- identifying stakeholders
- conducting a preliminary review of potential social impacts and benefits
- considering potential project design alternatives.

Baseline analysis

A social baseline analysis will describe the existing social conditions and trends within the study area. It provides a benchmark against which social changes can be anticipated and potential social impacts identified.

Assessment of Impact

The purpose of the assessment of impact is to identify the potential social impacts of a project and to assess their significance, with the objective of understanding how communities within the project's area of influence experience those impacts and the benefits of the project.

Steps involved in the assessment of impact typically includes:

- identifying the social changes caused by a project activity
- identifying the social impact
- assessing the significance of the social impact
- assessing the significance of the social impact after management measures are applied.

Impact mitigation and benefit enhancement measures

Once potentially significant impacts have been identified, a document outlining focused, reasonable, relevant, transparent and monitorable outcomes and measures for social impact mitigation and benefit enhancement measures is developed.

Social impact management plan

A social impact management plan (SIMP) is a plan that provides the practical basis for the implementation of measures identified to manage social impacts. For a social impact assessment undertaken under the Planning Act, the SIMP will be a non-mandatory tool available to use for risk management. It may also be used to inform a community benefit agreement.

Monitoring, review and update

The purpose of implementation monitoring is to ensure that management measures remain current and effective over the project's lifecycle. A SIMP may identify the need for monitoring, review and update of the SIMP and relevant processes or other monitoring frameworks and monitoring protocols can also be developed. Key monitoring and tracking measures include:

- indicators for tracking impacts (based on the indicators used in the social baseline)
- timing and frequency for monitoring the impacts at various project phases across the project lifecycle
- where information will be sourced
- who will perform the monitoring, including any proposed community participation.

Overview of the new social impact assessment process

Diagram 1 provides a graphic overview of the social impact assessment process.

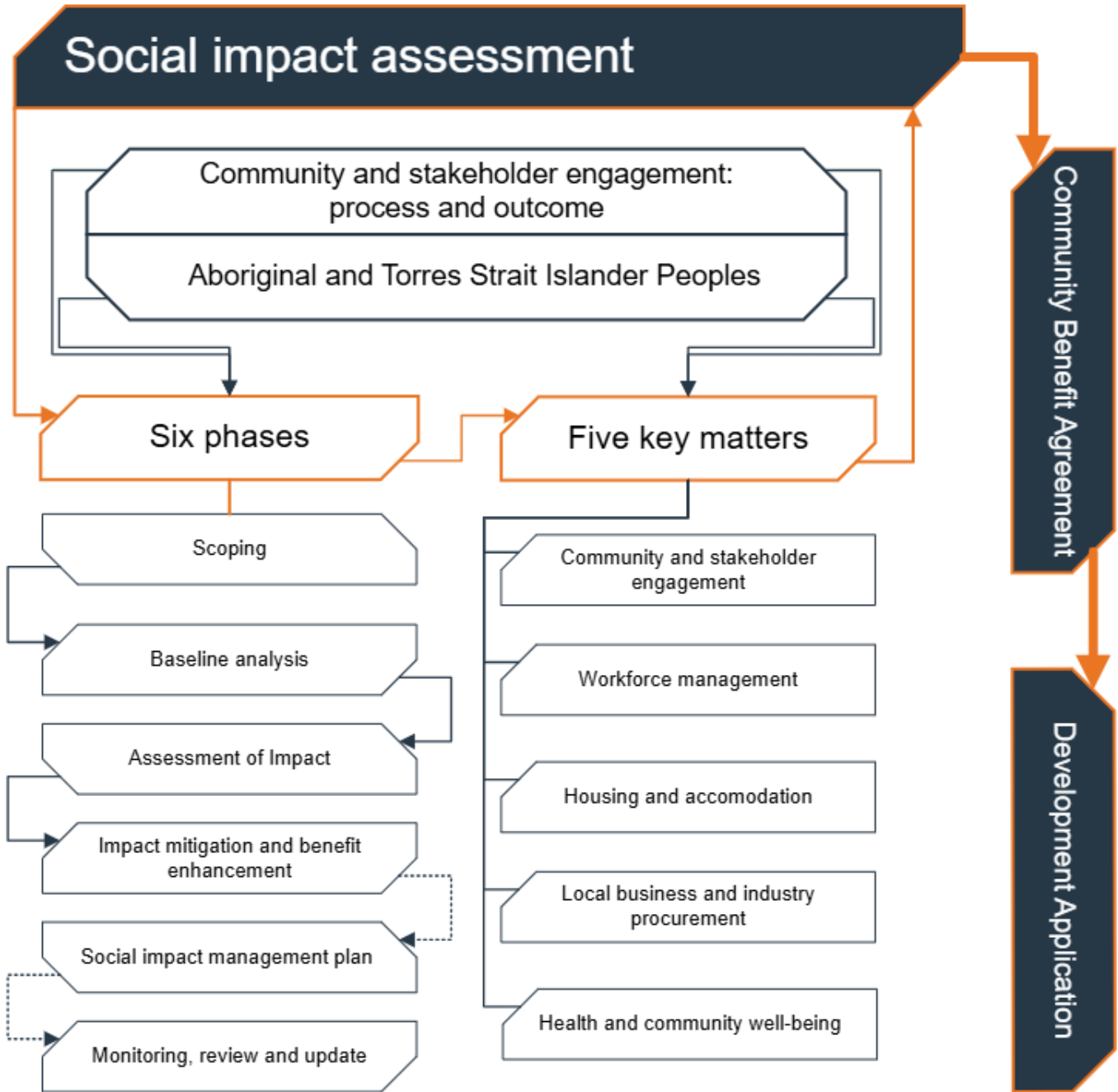


Diagram 1 – overview of the new social impact assessment process

Further information

For further information please contact the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning via renewablesplanning@dasilgp.qld.gov.au.