

Solar farm development assessment

This fact sheet provides an overview of the new Solar farm development assessment process under the *Planning (Social Impact and Community Benefit) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (Bill)*.

How are solar farms currently assessed?

The development of solar farms is currently regulated by Local Government. Where a Local Government makes the development of a solar farm assessable development, an applicant must submit a development application for assessment by the Local Government against the relevant provisions under the local planning scheme.

What is proposed to change?

On 3 February 2025, the Planning Regulation 2017 was amended to require all development applications for wind farms to be impact assessable. This change ensures mandatory public notification and third party appeal rights for submitters. Changes to State Code 23: Wind farm development in the State Development Assessment Provisions were also implemented as part of this change. For more information on wind farm reforms please see the department's [website](#).

Amendments are now proposed to the Queensland planning framework to make all solar farm developments impact assessable. The proposed amendments will also see large scale solar farms assessed and decided by the State Assessment and Referral Agency (SARA) in the future. A large-scale solar farm is a solar farm development that has a generation capacity of one megawatt or more and/or two hectares or more of site cover. Small scale solar farms will be impact assessable too, but will continue to be assessed and decided by the Local Government.

The proposed amendments to the Queensland planning framework also require proponents of large-scale renewable energy developments, where assessed by SARA, to undertake a social impact assessment (SIA) and enter into a community benefit agreement (CBA) with the relevant Local Government (or other relevant parties), before a development application can be lodged to ensure that potential impacts on local communities are carefully considered and a commitment is made to achieving a community benefit.

Why do we need this change?

There are variations and inconsistencies in how solar farms are currently regulated in Queensland. Social impacts are not always being identified, properly considered or mitigated to the satisfaction of a Local Government or host community. In practice this means that the host community is not always receiving a positive legacy benefit commensurate to the scale of social impact because there is no formal mechanism for a proponent to commit to delivering community benefits like other resource related projects that are assessed under different legislative pathways.

The proposed changes fix this problem and will ensure all renewable energy proponents build social license with local and regional host communities in advance of a development application being lodged. Frontloading this obligation also means that commitments made by the renewable energy sector to respond to social impacts and deliver community benefit are formalised in an agreement. This approach is expected to drive greater accountability of proponents and improved transparency of process and delivery of tangible benefits for the community.

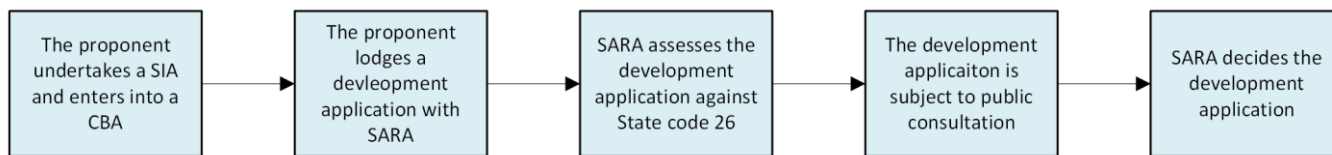
How will large-scale solar farms be assessed?

Once a proponent has undertaken a SIA and entered into a CBA, they must lodge a development application for their proposed large scale solar farm with the SARA for assessment. This will include assessment against the Local Government planning scheme and a new State Development Assessment Provisions (SDAP) State Code 26: Solar farm development (State code 26).

If the proposed large-scale solar farm is in a Priority Development Area (PDA), the development application will be assessed against the relevant PDA development scheme instead of the Local Government planning scheme.

The requirement for all solar farms to be impact assessable means the development applications will be subject to public notification and third-party appeal rights will apply. This means community members and other stakeholders will be able to have their say on a development proposal (during social impact assessment where required for large farms) and/or on a development application during the development assessment process.

The below diagram provides a graphic overview of the development assessment process for a large-scale solar farm.



What does this mean for small-scale solar farms?

Small-scale solar farms will remain assessed and decided by the Local Government, with assessment undertaken against their local planning scheme.

If the proposed small-scale solar farm is in a Priority Development Area, SARA will be the assessment manager and assess the development application against the relevant PDA development scheme instead of the Local Government planning scheme.

Small-scale solar farms will not be required to undertake a SIA or have a CBA in place.

What does this mean for the community?

The proposed changes to the Queensland planning framework will allow communities to be involved in matters affecting them by requiring all solar farms to be impact assessable. This will provide an opportunity for community members to express their views by making submissions and will also allow third party appeal rights. Large-scale solar farm developments will also require additional level of community involvement, through community and stakeholder engagement as a part of the social impact assessment process.

What does this mean for Local Government?

The proposed amendments will empower Local Governments to enter discussions with developers for large-scale solar farms well in advance of a development application being lodged. It will also ensure that the local community is consulted prior to lodgement of a development application, avoiding delays in approval processes due to lack of community awareness. Local Governments will remain the assessment manager where a proposed solar farm is small-scale (i.e. below the threshold for a large-scale solar farm).

What does this mean for industry?

The proposed amendments are designed to provide a consistent approach to assessing wind farm and solar farm developments across Queensland. Enhanced regulations will reduce uncertainty and community concerns and will allow proponents to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes with the community. Setting consistent standards for solar farms now will reduce future stakeholder conflict and support a strong, resilient renewable energy sector.

Further information

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