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State Planning Policy 2017 Review

Discussion paper: Natural hazards land use planning

August 2026

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Introduction

Queensland is exposed to a wide range of natural hazards, including flood, bushfires, coastal erosion, storm tide inundation, extreme heat and landslide. It is one of Australia's most disaster-prone states, experiencing over 97 significant natural disasters between 2011 and 2022¹. The frequency and intensity of natural hazards are increasing, placing greater pressure on communities and the economy.

Natural hazards cannot be eliminated, but new development can be designed and located to avoid or mitigate risks. Land use planning is a key part of Queensland's broader disaster resilience framework, helping to reduce future hazard risk, support safer and more resilient communities, and ensure that people, infrastructure and essential services can continue to function during and after natural hazard events. Land use planning works alongside disaster preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation activities under other legislation and governance arrangements.

Land use planning for natural hazards in Queensland

Planning for natural hazards is complex. Hazards vary in their type, frequency and severity. Risks can be influenced by factors such as:

- existing protective natural features
- the sensitivity, location or design of new development
- the characteristics of the area or land, including evacuation opportunities.

Planning decisions for new development need to consider whether a site is prone to risk, the potential impacts on community safety and recovery costs, and whether the development's design or operation can avoid, reduce or mitigate those risks. These considerations must be balanced against the need for and merits of the development.

Queensland's existing approach to land use planning for natural hazard risk is largely set out in the *Planning Act 2016*, the State Planning Policy 2017 (SPP) and local government planning schemes regulating development.

The Queensland Government sets statewide policy through the State Planning Policy (SPP). Local government applies the SPP's natural hazard policies by identifying hazards, assessing risk and establishing planning scheme requirements that respond to local conditions and community needs.

While planning schemes can help reduce future risk, they cannot remove or fully address risks associated with existing development that was approved under previous planning frameworks and based on the information available at the time.

Investment in infrastructure and upgrades and existing protective natural features (for example, mangroves) may also mitigate the risks of natural hazards.

The Queensland Government provides technical guidance, spatial information and funding to support natural hazard identification, risk assessment and planning for natural hazards.

Queensland Floods Commission Inquiry

The 2010/2011 floods significantly impacted Queensland. More than 78% of the state was declared a disaster zone and an estimated 29,000 homes and businesses were affected by flood inundation. The Queensland Floods Commission Inquiry released a final Inquiry Report in March 2012 containing a comprehensive roadmap and 177 recommendations floodplain management, land use planning, building regulations and more.

¹ Queensland Reconstruction Authority, 'Queensland Strategy for Disaster Resilience 2022-2027' (September 2022) 3.

The Queensland Government response supported all of the final Inquiry Report recommendations, noting that some related to private entities, Local Government or Commonwealth responsibilities and acknowledged a collaborative approach was required, developing an Implementation Framework to clearly identify key areas of work and allocate clear lines of responsibility.

Purpose of the SPP review

The Queensland Government is reviewing the SPP to ensure it remains effective and responds to Queensland's changing needs and challenges.

The SPP has not been reviewed since 2017, and initial feedback has identified the following areas for exploration:

- greater state-wide consistency in policy implementation
- clarify when local variation in mapping and regulations is appropriate
- clarify what levels of natural hazard risk may be considered acceptable or tolerable
- more technical guidance and strategic guidance to consider impacts on housing delivery and other priority areas
- more efficient processes to update local government planning schemes with latest data and planning requirements
- greater certainty on timing of planning changes, when and how to engage.

This consultation paper provides context for the SPP review, shares early feedback and seeks comment on the draft SPP.

Have your say on the issues and questions raised in this paper

Consultation is open until Monday 26 October 2026.

Submissions should be sent to:

Deputy Premier, Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning and Minister for Industrial Relations

C/O Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (Planning Policy team)

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Proposed changes to the SPP natural hazards policies

How does the current SPP address natural hazards?

Effective land use planning involves judgement about how to interpret scientific hazard mapping methodologies in a way that balances risk, community safety, economic development and broader public interests. For example, planning decisions may determine whether housing should be avoided in a hazard-prone area, if the risk may be managed or whether the vegetation should be cleared to prioritise housing supply.

At a technical level, these decisions are informed by hazard mapping, modelling, risk assessments and other technical investigations that evaluate the likelihood and consequences of hazard events, the vulnerability of people and assets, and the effectiveness of potential mitigation or management measures.

The level of planning regulation should be proportionate to the level of risk. Some types of development may be more suitable in hazard-prone areas than others. For example, a childcare centre may not be appropriate in an area exposed to significant flood risk, while other forms of development, like a warehouse, may be able to proceed if appropriate risk mitigation measures are in place.

To consider these matters, the current SPP² provides a structure requiring local government:

1. Identify areas exposed to natural hazard.
2. Undertake a fit-for-purpose risk assessment to determine if risks to people and property are acceptable or tolerable.
3. Apply planning controls that, for example:
 - avoid or reduce natural hazards risk to people and property to a tolerable or acceptable level
 - support disaster management and emergency response
 - maintain the function of critical infrastructure during hazard events
 - protect natural features that help reduce hazard impacts, such as dunes, wetlands and vegetation
 - development in natural hazard areas avoids risks to public safety and the environment from hazardous materials being stored or released during natural hazard events.

The current SPP is supported by non-statutory guidance material³ that helps explain how the policy should be applied in practice. It is titled: *Integrating State Interests in Planning Schemes – Guidance for local government*.

What changes are being proposed?

The draft SPP retains the State's interest in protecting new development from natural hazards while supporting resilient communities, sustainable growth and outcomes that do not worsen risk for existing development.

It aims to provide clearer direction on how local government achieves the following outcomes:

- protect people and property in new development from natural events
- improve the resilience of new or upgraded transport, energy, water, digital and community infrastructure
- protect new development from erosion, including coastal erosion
- manage risks associated with acid sulfate soils.

It is proposed to remove the policy statement requiring local government to undertake a fit-for-purpose natural hazard risk assessment. This is repetitive as the need for a risk assessment is built into the other SPP policies.

Local government will still need to carry out risk assessments to demonstrate compliance with SPP policy outcomes. Associated guidance will continue to provide advice and steps for risk assessments and relevant Australian Standards.

The draft SPP also shifts the hierarchy from 'avoid then mitigate' policies to 'avoid where the risk cannot be mitigated to an acceptable or tolerable risk'. The current 'avoid then mitigate' approach is less nuanced because it does not fully account for different hazards, developments and risk contexts where mitigation or improved risk management may achieve an acceptable or tolerable level of risk.

The draft SPP includes new state aspirations which guide how competing or complementary interests are to be balanced in practice. These strategic aspirations set the overall direction for the SPP and support balanced, practical decision-making that considers the needs and objectives of the state as a whole. This

² See page 51, State Planning Policy 2017 for further policies about natural hazards, risk and resilience.

³ See list of guidance at **Appendix A**.

ensures that natural hazard risk mitigation is balanced with the need for land release to support growth, such as in housing supply.

The current SPP guidance will need to be updated for implementation, with additional information, examples and advice to help local government, planning professionals and other users understand and apply the SPP to hazards.

The draft SPP continues to use the terms 'acceptable', 'tolerable' or 'intolerable' without defining these terms. These terms are currently discussed in accompanying SPP guidance, which will be updated, as they are dependent on local development context.

Scientific and technical information to help understand natural hazards may change from time to time to reflect advances in technology and information and is best suited to guidance which may be updated more regularly than the SPP as a statutory instrument with legal effect.

It is recognised that guidance is also needed to determine what may be 'acceptable', 'tolerable' or 'intolerable' risk when regulating development. The updated accompanying SPP guidance could address these terms in greater detail, providing a model approach for implementing state policy, while allowing flexibility to respond to local circumstances as per the following example.

Has the draft SPP policy approach progressed towards greater clarity and consistency?

The following is an alternative approach for feedback as part of the SPP consultation.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO SPP POLICIES

The draft SPP 2026 has been reorganised to provide clearer direction on *how* Local Government can achieve state policies.

As an alternative approach, the SPP state natural hazard policies could be further *reframed in different development contexts*. This way of expressing policies may help ensure Local Government planning schemes are appropriately aligned.

For example:

SPP Policy x - Vulnerable uses should not be located in natural hazard areas where there is a credible risk to life, unless it can be demonstrated that risk is reduced to a tolerable level

SPP glossary – new term

A *vulnerable use* is characterised by development for occupants with limited ability to self-evacuate (relying on others for mobility, care safety or decision-making); those unaware or unable to respond quickly to hazard warnings; where the use performs essential community functions where disruptions could have consequences for public safety health or recovery (e.g. hospitals, childcare centres)

SPP guidance (non-statutory) to expand on how to achieve policies and technical detail

SPP Policy x – Policy x is intended to clarify how vulnerable uses are treated in a hazard risk area. Development may proceed if all are satisfied:

- The hazard cannot be avoided or mitigated to a tolerable level.
- The risk is reduced to a tolerable level, such as through design, siting, building and engineering controls.
- Any residual risk is identified and capable of being managed.
- Safe evacuation can be demonstrated for the relevant hazard.
- The development does not increase the hazard severity of impacts or create evacuation constraints, including consideration of cumulative risk.

Technical details and guidance could be provided, including how to undertake a fit-for-purpose risk assessment and relevant Australian Standards and determine what is tolerable and respective planning controls.

Questions

1. Do you support the proposed shift from an “avoid then mitigate” approach to an approach that allows development where risks can be appropriately managed or mitigated? Why or why not?
2. What information, guidance or factors should be considered when determining whether natural hazard risk is acceptable, tolerable or intolerable?
3. What role should the Queensland Government and local governments play in assessing and managing natural hazard risk through planning?
4. Where, if at all, should Queensland establish state-wide limits on new development due to natural hazard risk?
5. Where, if at all, should Queensland draw a clear line between acceptable and unacceptable natural hazard risk for new development?
6. In what circumstances should development be supported in areas exposed to known natural hazard risk, and what measures should be considered to manage that risk?

Proposed changes to associated SPP guidance

What guidance is currently available?

The SPP 2017 is supported by non-statutory guidance material⁴ that helps explain how the policy should be applied in practice. The guidance provides a model approach and additional information, examples and advice to help local government, planning professionals and other users understand and apply the SPP.

The primary guidance document is *Integrating State Interests in Planning Schemes – Guidance for Local Government*, which provides advice to local governments on incorporating state planning priorities and requirements into local planning schemes.

What guidance improvements are being considered?

The Queensland Government is considering a range of new and updated guidance materials to support implementation of the new SPP, including:

- updates to existing guidance for local government to reflect contemporary planning challenges and practices
- new guidance explaining how the new SPP should be applied
- new guidance summarising the key differences between the 2017 SPP and the new SPP
- new guidance to support state agencies and local government when reviewing planning schemes.

Questions

1. What improvements can be made to existing guidance?
2. Is there any other guidance required for local government, businesses, communities or landowners?
3. When should state advice be guidance or mandatory for local government?

Natural hazards mapping

What is natural hazards mapping?

Natural hazards maps may identify areas affected by flooding, bushfire, coastal hazards, landslide or storm tide inundation, which can trigger specific land use planning and building assessment requirements.

⁴ See list of guidance at **Appendix A**.

There are different types of natural hazards maps which serve different purposes for government and for property owners and developers, for example:

- An information map, like the Queensland Floodplain Assessment Overlay (QFAO) map developed in 2013, identifies potential floodplain areas that may be susceptible to flooding and indicate where government may consider further flood studies.
- An advanced flood hazard study map is based on detailed modelling for a specific locality and provides a fit for purpose understanding of flood behaviour (e.g. flood depths, velocities, flood levels) as an evidence base to inform local government when making or amending its planning scheme before a risk-based assessment is applied.
- A flood overlay map in a local government planning scheme identifies land subject to flooding that warrants some types of new development or building being assessed against additional benchmarks to standards to apply conditions or other requirements apply to new development.

These examples relate to maps used for land use planning. They do not include other maps used to inform disaster planning and emergency management for existing development or areas.

Current natural hazards mapping

Preparing natural hazards mapping and modelling is costly and takes time to prepare and integrate into schemes. This means that currently some local governments seek to rely on mapping or modelling in development assessment before it is integrated in the scheme and others seek Temporary Local Planning Instruments, sometimes extended multiple times without community consultation.

Flood mapping is based on best available data, hydrologic and hydraulic modelling and a range of technical inputs, assumptions and methodologies and available resourcing. As a result, different technical inputs, different studies and different assumptions and risk appetites can produce different flood maps for the same catchment.

The draft SPP continues to require that local government identify a natural hazard area, assess risk, describe the development context and determine what regulatory requirements to include in its local government planning scheme.

In Queensland:

- Flood hazard area mapping is largely developed by local government and may be informed by Level 1, 2, or 3 studies.
- Bushfire prone area mapping is provided by the Queensland Government and may be used or refined by local government for its planning schemes.
- Storm tide inundation mapping is provided by the Queensland Government.
- Erosion prone area mapping is statutory and made by the State under the *Coastal Management and Protection Act 1995*.
- Landslide hazard areas are not mapped by the Queensland Government and may be mapped by local government according to the slope gradient and a localised landslide study.

Proposed changes

The Queensland Government is exploring how it can achieve greater consistency, transparency and timeliness across future natural hazard mapping for land use planning, particularly flood and bushfire, to provide greater certainty across councils and regions affected by hazards, which improves development certainty, efficiency and reduces the cost to apply for new development.

Flood studies are often funded by the Queensland Government with local government using the information to prepare detailed flood mapping, inform risk assessments and the development of planning controls. These types of technical studies are difficult to carry out state-wide due to the size and diversity of Queensland; availability of technical expertise and considerations of local hazard context.

Significant state and local investment have already been made on local hazard studies and hazard mapping products. Consideration is needed as to how a greater state role may achieve best value and efficiencies with regards to natural hazard mapping, given this context.

Since 2022, the Queensland and Australian Governments have committed \$49 million through the Queensland Flood Risk Management Program to support flood studies, flood risk assessments, floodplain management initiatives and other flood resilience initiatives across Queensland. The program includes targeted funding for 39 eligible councils to improve local flood risk information and management.

The SPP and associated guidance provides a range of information about mapping methodology and potential inputs; however, a state-wide methodology for state mapping or state-wide requirements for studies and/or mapping across catchments or councils is not detailed.

Feedback is sought on how the state may appropriately revise requirements for natural hazard mapping and improve certainty for communities and industry.

Questions

1. Where is greater state direction or guidance needed, and where should local government retain flexibility for natural hazard mapping?
2. How would you like to be informed and involved when changes are made to natural hazard mapping affecting your property and community?
3. What could be done to make natural hazard mapping simpler, faster and more consistent across Queensland?

State assessment benchmarks

SPP 2017 contains assessment benchmarks which local government must use when assessing development applications.

As part of the SPP review, it is proposed that the SPP 2017 assessment benchmarks are relocated to the Planning Regulation 2017 instead of the SPP itself. Early feedback indicates it would be an easier system for users if all assessment benchmarks of the State were in the one place and the SPP focuses on local government plan-making, rather than development assessment.

It is proposed that the current SPP 2017 assessment benchmarks for natural hazards are 'like for like' and relocated to the Planning Regulation 2017; as these remain relevant for the proposed draft SPP.

Further details are provided in the accompanying consultation paper, *The future of assessment benchmarks in the State Planning Policy*.

Questions

1. What is useful or challenging about the SPP 2017 assessment benchmarks for natural hazards?
2. If you have experience lodging, assessing or deciding development applications in natural hazard areas, what aspects of the current assessment benchmarks work well and what could be improved?

Efficient and transparent processes for amending local government planning schemes

Early feedback indicates that delays in integrating hazard mapping into planning schemes can result in outdated information and greater reliance on temporary instruments for long-term planning decisions.

Local government and community roles in making or amending planning schemes

A local government may amend its planning scheme to include new natural hazard maps or natural hazard development assessment codes.

Generally, amendments to a planning scheme may be 'minor' or 'major' in nature and may take three months to multiple years, depending on what changes are proposed and if local government opts to following processes set out in the statutory Minister's Guidelines and Rules (MGR) or a 'tailored' and streamlined approach agreed with the Planning Minister under the *Planning Act 2016*.

Local government must follow additional processes when making changes to planning schemes with regards to natural hazards to balance community safety objectives with impacts to landowners.

Currently, the *Planning Act 2016* provides that local government may amend planning schemes to reduce a material risk of serious harm from natural hazards, without giving rise to compensation claims, where local government demonstrates that that feasible alternatives have been considered and affected landowners engaged.

The *Minister's Guidelines and Rules* set out this process for landowner engagement and details the Feasible Alternative Assessment Report to be prepared by local government to assess the alternatives for reducing the risk, why particular alternatives would not adequately address the risk or achieve the objective and why the proposed changes are preferred.

All community members have an opportunity to provide feedback when making new or making major amendments to planning schemes; but landowners that are directly affected as a result of proposed changes to natural hazards in a planning scheme will be notified directly.

Given potential time delays in making or amending planning schemes, it is possible for local government to introduce an urgent Temporary Local Planning Instrument (TLPI) that applies instead of a planning scheme in the interim.

This may occur where there is a significant risk of serious adverse cultural, economic, environmental or social conditions and the delays in amending the planning scheme would increase the risk. There are no rules requiring public consultation on a TLPI, but local government may choose to consult as appropriate.

This reflects the lengthy timeframes associated with planning scheme amendments, which can limit local governments' ability to respond proactively to emerging natural hazard risks.

Proposed changes

While the SPP review is not considering changes to the *Planning Act 2016*, changes to the Minister's Guidelines and Rules are proposed to align with the draft SPP 2026.

The SPP review is considering how efficiencies can be achieved for local government while maintaining transparency; which may result in legislative changes or guidance.

Questions

1. What opportunities are there to improve engagement with landowners, businesses and communities on planning changes relating to natural hazards?
2. How can new or updated hazard information be more readily incorporated into planning controls? What is causing delays?
3. What changes could improve the efficiency of planning scheme amendments relating to natural hazard while maintaining appropriate transparency and community engagement?

APPENDIX A – Current SPP Guidance

The following SPP Guidance is currently available to support the SPP 2017:

- *Delivery of State Interests through the Planning Regulation 2017* – Guidance for Local Government – explains how state planning requirements are reflected through Queensland's planning framework and how they should be considered in planning decisions.
- *Strategic airports and aviation facilities state interest – example planning scheme assessment benchmarks* - provides example planning scheme provisions and assessment benchmarks to help local governments protect the ongoing operation and safety of strategic airports and aviation facilities.
- *Natural hazard, risk and resilience state interest – bushfire – example planning scheme assessment benchmarks* - provides example planning scheme provisions and assessment benchmarks to assist local governments in managing bushfire risk through development assessment and land use planning.
- *Natural hazards, risk and resilience – bushfire: State Planning Policy – state interest guidance material* - provides detailed guidance on interpreting and implementing the SPP bushfire policies, including hazard identification, risk management and planning responses.

These above guidance documents also reference other state government guidance and Australian Standards that may assist.