

Victorian Government Response to the Report of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee on its Inquiry into the Environment Effects Statement Process in Victoria

The report of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee (ENRC) Inquiry into Victoria's Environment Effects Statement (EES) process has recommended comprehensive reform, noting that the need for reform is both widely recognised and overdue. The Inquiry determined that reform would establish much-needed legislative clarity and provide a more robust basis for protecting Victoria's environment.

Other public inquiries, including several by the Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission, recommended reform of the EES process, primarily to reduce the burden on business by enhancing efficiency and certainty, thereby encouraging investment in Victoria. In addition, the Council of Australian Governments has recently prioritised the improvement of environmental assessment and approval processes across all jurisdictions to reduce regulatory burden.

The Victorian Government review has recognised the need for reform of the statutory framework for environmental impact assessment (EIA). This reform will be driven by the following priorities:

- The need to protect Victoria's environment
- The need to strengthen the efficiency, timeliness and certainty of the EIA process in order to reduce the regulatory burden on business and encourage investment
- The need to ensure the transparency, accountability and fairness of applicable processes.

Having regard to ENRC's recommendations, and the three priorities above, the Victorian Government will proceed with reform of Victoria's EIA framework, including necessary legislative changes, on the basis of the following elements:

- EIA processes will be reformed to provide certainty for all parties about processes, considerations and timeframes
- The reforms will be grounded in a clear set of objectives to guide their implementation
- A tiered suite of EIA processes will be developed to enable efficient assessment of project proposals with a variable potential for significant environmental impacts
- The reforms will embody principles of fairness, including for third party rights, as well as for reviews of key procedural decisions

- Opportunities will be addressed for establishing clear links between the outcomes of the EIA process and regulatory decision-making under applicable laws, as well as compliance oversight by relevant bodies, to both drive improved environmental outcomes and streamline overall regulatory requirements
- The reforms will provide an option for enabling the assessment of strategic proposals that are wider in scope than individual projects, where this would offer both efficiency and environmental benefits.