

Consultation with the Water Group on major projects

A guideline to help consultations and companies work with the Water Group on major projects.

Purpose and scope

This guideline will help consultants and companies working on major projects with the Water Group in the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

Major projects are State Significant Developments, State Significant Infrastructure, Critical State Significant Infrastructure and associated modifications. This advice is applicable to consultants and companies working on:

- water monitoring and modelling plans for petroleum and coal exploration
- major project proposals, including requirements for environmental assessments
- post approval management plans such as water management plans, rehabilitation management plans, and water monitoring and modelling plans.

This document does not apply to general licence, approval, or other enquiries. These enquiries should be directed to Water Assist at water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/water-assist or by emailing water.enquiries@dpie.nsw.gov.au.

Consulting with the Water Group

Consultation with the Water Group may be either mandatory or voluntary. It allows for two-way dialogue to ensure appropriate development takes place which supports the sustainable use and management of water resources in NSW.

Companies or consultants may need to consult with the Water Group for several reasons, including:

- conditions of a development consent
- undertaking a development or assessment of a proposal
- understanding detailed water licensing requirements related to a major project.

The Water Group can provide advice to ensure best practice is followed and water-related issues are identified and understood. Consulting with the Water Group also ensures development activities are undertaken in accordance with the NSW Government's regulatory and management framework.

You may consult with the Water Group via email, phone or video conference.

Video meetings should only be requested for more complex queries or uncertainties you would like the Water Group to address.

How to contact the Water Group

The Water Assessments team should be contacted through the Major Projects portal at www.planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects or by email at water.assessments@dpie.nsw.gov.au.

When making contact, please ensure your request is as detailed as possible and outlines:

- who you are and who you represent. If you are a consultant, please list the name of the company you represent
- any queries or uncertainties you would like the Water Group to address
- the nature, location, and stage of development you are undertaking (including links to relevant online information)
- the specific piece of work you are undertaking (for example, water management plan, groundwater impact assessment)
- specific requirement or reason to consult with the Water Group (for example condition X of consent number Y)
- any earlier communication with the Water Group on this project
- specific requests, for example:
 - review a management plan
 - meeting to discuss application of the Aquifer Interference Policy to a project
- any constraints or critical timeframes for your project. Note that you should plan for sufficient time to consult with the Water Group on project schedules where this is a condition of consent or approval
- in many cases, the Water Group will be able to address your query quickly by phone, email or video conference.

Meeting with the Water Group

The Water Group has internal rules on meeting with proponents and their consultants. These rules are designed to protect our staff, ensure transparency and probity, and ensure that adequate records are maintained of these meetings. In particular:

- we will decline requests for informal meetings such as at cafes, restaurants and bars. Meetings should be arranged at an official office location, on site, or another appropriate community venue (such as a community hall). Online meetings are now most common
- an agenda should be prepared and circulated by the meeting initiator in advance and a meeting record circulated after the meeting
- in many cases, Water Group officers will not attend meetings with proponents and their consultants without the Planning Group from the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure being present.

Providing material for review

All material for review should be made available to the Water Group via the Major Projects portal: planningportal.nsw.gov.au/major-projects/help.

Electronic documents should generally be provided in searchable PDF format. Where requested, data may need to be provided as tables in spreadsheet format, and models and GIS maps need to be provided in appropriate formats for examination.

What you can expect from us

The Water Group will provide a clear, reasonable and practical review. Where our requests or requirements may lead to significant delay or cost to a project, we will consider alternative solutions or options that achieve the desired outcomes of the NSW Government.

Where required, a Water Group staff member will meet with you within a reasonable time of us providing comment that could significantly impact on your project.

Timeframes

During the assessment of a project, the Planning Group will lead the whole-of-government assessment process and advise the Water Group on expected timeframes to provide advice.

For post-approval requests by the proponent, allow 4-5 weeks for the Water Group to review a complex document such as a management plan or extraction plan. Minor plans and revisions to

earlier plans are likely to be quicker, however please discuss any time constraints with the Water Group Assessments team.

It's important that you allow sufficient time for government agencies to undertake a review, make any necessary changes (in consultation with that agency) and seek approval of that plan as required by any relevant conditions.

Where delays are anticipated we will advise you of the expected timeframes and discuss if there are any potential interim options that may help to reduce any subsequent delays to your project.

We will also endeavour to respond to any request for meetings by proponents within 3 days.

What we expect from you

First and foremost, we expect all consultation to be open and genuine. This includes allowing sufficient time for us to undertake any necessary technical review and for you to consider and respond to our comments.

We expect that you will consult with affected third parties, as necessary, and ensure they are aware of any proposed activities that will impact on them.

Meetings should have a clear purpose, and sufficient time and detail should be provided to the Water Group to allow us to prepare and ensure the appropriate staff are able to attend (who are often located in separate technical teams with other priorities). As we receive many requests for advice and consultation each year, we do not usually engage in general meet-and-greet type meetings except for very large or complex projects, or where there is minimal disruption to our staff. It is recommended that project briefings be timed to assist the Water Group's review and assessment of an Environmental Impact Statement, management plan or similar.

We expect all documentation to be clear and easy to navigate, and all necessary supporting information to be made available to the Water Group in a timely manner.

More information

Water Assessments Unit, the Water Group in the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water:

Website: water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/licensing-and-trade/major-projects

Email: water.assessments@dpie.nsw.gov.au