

Project Development Considerations

The following is not intended to be a guide to obligations under planning laws and should not be relied on for those purposes. Planning approval processes can vary significantly depending on the nature of the development. This Toolkit is instead focused on engagement for the purposes of developments requiring a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and a Community Benefit Agreement (CBA). To the extent the planning framework is set out, it is solely to assist the reader to contextualise when a SIA and a CBA must be considered.

Introduction

This section sets out the main stages of project development and delivery, and how councils can influence major project impacts and benefits, and advice on coexistence with other land uses and end-of-project-life considerations. It covers the use of infrastructure agreements and approvals required under legislation other than the *Planning Act 2016* (Planning Act).

Renewable energy project development

Renewable energy projects progress through a series of interdependent stages, led by proponents in consultation with a range of stakeholders, including federal and state governments, councils, landholders, communities and community groups.

The stages are outlined on the following page to highlight some of the typical actions of proponents (where a proponent does not progress under the coordinated project process), providing indicative information on project development activities most relevant to councils. The information is not comprehensive. Every project and its specific characteristics are different. The full suite of actions undertaken by proponents will be guided by project development plans that consider the needs of investors and advisors, comply with legislation and regulation, and reflect agreements made with host landholders and neighbouring properties.



Stanthorpe CBD

Renewable energy project stages

Feasibility

Proponents assess the viability of the project. The focus is on site selection, early engagement with key stakeholders and identification of potential risks.

**Proponent steps may include:**

- Conduct site and resource testing.
- Undertake preliminary environmental and cultural heritage risk assessments.
- Begin early landholder engagement and secure preliminary agreements.
- Perform high-level design and early grid connection enquiries with Powerlink and the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO).
- Identify potential regulatory approval pathways and develop an approvals strategy.
- Scope SIA requirements and define key focus areas.
- Map stakeholders, including councils and local community groups.
- Develop a preliminary economic feasibility analysis, including cost and revenue modelling.
- Establish initial engagement and communication approaches, including managing complaints.

Early engagement / scoping

Early project concepts shared. Scope of studies and stakeholder engagement defined.

**Proponent steps may include:**

- Publish early project information, including maps, indicative schedules and project scope.
- Continue landholder and neighbour engagement and secure agreements.
- Submit a notice of intent to commence engagement to relevant councils (if required under the Planning Act).
- Develop an engagement plan, potentially inviting input from council.
- Host community engagement activities to introduce the project and gather early feedback.
- Develop detailed community and stakeholder engagement plans to inform the SIA.
- Initiate early discussions on CBA with councils.
- Progress scoping studies (for example: noise, visual, traffic, bushfire, hydrology, ecology and heritage).

Project development (early development)

Key studies are undertaken, the design is refined, and referral and grid connection steps are progressed.

**Proponent steps may include:**

- Complete detailed planning studies (for example: SIA, noise, visual, bushfire, traffic, ecology, heritage and hydrology).
- Refine project design based on study outcomes and stakeholder feedback.
- Lodge Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) referrals under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (if triggered) and respond to feedback.
- Progress grid connection steps, including technical studies and negotiations with Powerlink and the AEMO.
- Begin defining community benefit initiatives (such as local jobs, infrastructure upgrades).
- Initiate or continue CBA discussions with councils, even if not required by regulation.
- Enter into a CBA with the relevant council.
- Plan for access roads, worker accommodation and laydown areas.
- Prepare end-of-project-life arrangements.

Approvals

Focus is on obtaining formal approvals.



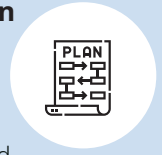
Project approved – financial close

Proponents align with stakeholders to ensure readiness for mobilisation and construction.



Pre-construction

With approvals in place, the focus shifts to preparing for construction and ensuring readiness.



Proponent steps may include:

- Finalise the CBA with council/s (if required) and publish SIA findings.
- Lodge a development application (DA) with the relevant assessment manager and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) materials (if relevant).
- Submit grid connection approval applications and respond to technical feedback.

Proponent steps may include:

- Execute Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) and Operations and Maintenance (O&M) contracts.
- Finalise financing documents, including revenue contracts (for example, Power Purchase Agreements or Contracts for Difference).
- Appoint a principal contractor and community relations lead.
- Publish construction timelines, contact details and complaints processes.
- Confirm traffic, emergency and monitoring plans with council/s.
- Ensure CBA commitments are scheduled for delivery.

Proponent steps may include:

- Finalise construction schedules, site access plans and laydown areas.
- Develop worker accommodation and emergency response plans.
- Define construction communication and complaints processes to keep stakeholders informed.
- Engage with the Queensland Electricity Regulator on Generation Authority requirements.
- Conduct pre-construction meetings with council to confirm readiness plans.
- Finalise procurement strategies, prioritising local suppliers where possible.
- Develop detailed traffic management plans to minimise community disruption.



Hughenden workers accommodation - Powerlink

Construction

This is the most disruptive stage for communities and requires careful management of impacts and communication.



Operations

Once operational, the focus moves to performance, compliance and delivering long-term community benefits.



End-of-project-life

Implement end-of-project-life plans, rehabilitation of the site or repowering the project.



Proponent steps may include:

- Manage works within approval conditions and safety standards.
- Keep residents informed of schedules, impacts and progress through regular updates.
- Resolve complaints promptly and transparently.
- Deliver agreed CBA commitments and report progress to council/s and communities.
- Implement real-time monitoring systems for environmental and social impacts.
- Ensure emergency response plans are in place and communicated to relevant stakeholders.
- Maintain a dedicated community liaison officer to address concerns.

Proponent steps may include:

- Operate safely within approval conditions and publish performance reports.
- Deliver agreed CBA commitments and community benefit initiatives.
- Engage regularly with council/s and communities to ensure benefits align with evolving priorities.
- Update end-of-project-life or repowering plans as technology and market conditions evolve.
- Develop long-term maintenance schedules to optimise asset performance.
- Explore opportunities for integrating new technologies to improve efficiency or capacity.

Proponent steps may include:

- Deliver end-of-project-life or repowering plans within approval conditions (state codes), agreed standards and timelines.
- Update landholders and the community on final outcomes and rehabilitation activities.
- Ensure materials from end-of-project-life assets are recycled or disposed of responsibly.
- Publish a final report summarising the project's lifecycle, benefits delivered and rehabilitation outcomes.



Biloela

Multiple project developments

Key points:



Cumulative impacts may occur when there are multiple activities, developments or projects occurring at the same time in a Local Government Area (LGA) or region, or in neighbouring municipalities.



While impacts may be minor on their own, when combined, they can become significant.



Cumulative impacts can have environmental, economic and social implications. They can create reputational risks for councils and proponents if communities feel that growth is unmanaged, inequitable, imposes social or economic burdens, or is at odds with local priorities and established industries.



To effectively manage cumulative impacts, collaboration with neighbouring councils, Regional Organisations of Councils and state government agencies may be beneficial. This collaboration can enhance information sharing, strengthen negotiating power with proponents, and reduce duplication of effort across neighbouring councils impacted by the same project. The SIA guideline contains specific content on identifying and considering cumulative impacts.



Community engagement will help to ensure certainty for the community and build trust in both the council and the proponent(s) in managing cumulative impacts over time.



Councils can negotiate CBAs collectively between multiple developers, or with other councils, to ensure cumulative social impacts within an LGA and across the region are effectively addressed.

Examples in action:

- **Gladstone Regional Council** offers a **public GIS platform** that maps the renewable projects in the region. Using a spreadsheet format can effectively support the development of GIS mapping for these projects, allowing for easy sharing with the public and proponents. This approach can enhance transparency and provide insights into the scale and current stages of projects in the region, while excluding any commercially confidential information.
- **Isaac Regional Council** maintains a spreadsheet to monitor project status and links to approval documentation. Separate sheets track CBA progress and proponent engagement. A project tracking page monitors project status and links to approval documentation.

Council-led industry forum

"In my experience, energy proponents tend to be quite secretive – there's not much sharing or collaboration between them. Often, they run separate community engagement programs without coordinating with one another, which can be frustrating.

I've wondered why we couldn't flip things around – hold a forum where council briefs all interested energy proponents at once. We could lay out our community legacy expectation, explain what social licence looks like here and connect them with the right people. It might help, but the challenge is that most proponents are still in the early stages, just scoping or selling, so it's unclear if it would be useful yet."

Council engagement participant, 2025.

Coexistence

Renewable energy projects and other major projects must take into consideration existing land uses of established infrastructure and industries. These land uses may include grazing, cropping, resource extraction, tourism, environmental protection and conservation.



Coexistence with other land uses

While council is not the assessment manager of DAs for wind farms, large-scale solar farms and battery storage facilities, it plays a strategic role in planning for renewable energy projects in the region, to ensure that projects support, rather than displace, existing economic, social, environmental and cultural land uses. This may include setting policies in local planning schemes that limit fragmentation of agricultural land, protect biodiversity corridors, minimise visual impacts and look for opportunities for coexistence.

Coexistence Queensland

Coexistence Queensland is an independent statutory body established to help facilitate and address how landholders, communities, government, the resources sector and energy industries should work together.

The organisation works across gas, energy and resources sectors, and is a fundamental resource to help councils address emerging challenges and opportunities facing rural and regional communities. Visit [Coexistence Queensland](#) for more information.

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