

Social Impact Assessment Guideline

State significant projects

October 2020





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exhibition
purposes

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Contents

Interpreter Services	III
<hr/>	
1. Introduction	7
<hr/>	
1.1 Benefits	8
1.2 Using this Guideline	9
1.3 When to undertake an SIA	9
1.4 SIA principles	10
1.5 Guideline language	11
2. Overview	12
<hr/>	
2.1 Support technical supplement	13
2.2 Alignment with other process	13
3. SIA reports	14
<hr/>	
3.1 Introduction	14
3.2 Modifications	15
3.3 Preparing an SIA report	15
3.3.1 Required information	15
3.3.2 Social locality	16
3.3.3 Potential social impacts	18
3.3.4 Categorising impacts	19
3.3.5 Refining the project	21
3.3.6 Incorporating EIA elements	21
3.3.7 Data collection	22
3.3.8 Social baseline	22
3.3.9 Predicting and analysing social impacts	23
3.3.10 Evaluating social impacts	23

3.3.11 Responses	24
3.3.11.1 Responding to negative social impacts	24
3.3.11.2 Responding to positive social impacts	24
3.3.12 Social impact management work plan	24

4. Social impact management 26

4.1 Introduction	26
4.2 Preparing a SIMP	26
4.2.1 Objectives	26
4.2.2 Suggested SIMP inclusions	26

Appendix A – Community engagement 28

Appendix B – Authors of SIA documents 33

Appendix C – Review questions 34

List of tables

Table 1 Abbreviations	6
Table 2 Principles to guide the SIA process	10
Table 3 Terms used in this Guideline	11
Table 4 Useful engagement techniques for social impact assessment	30
Table 5 Authors of SIA documents	32
Table 6 Review questions	33

List of figures

Figure 1 SIA places people at the heart of planning	7
Figure 2 The SIA process aligned with the assessment process	12
Figure 3 The SIA process in detail	12
Figure 4 The scalable complexity of SIA	14
Figure 5 Project's social locality - confined example	17
Figure 6 Project social locality - diverse example	18
Figure 7 Example relationship between the final SIA Report and other EIS specialist studies	21
Figure 8 Analysis of positive and negative impacts	23

Table 1 Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Term
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EP&A Act	Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979
CPP	Community Participation Plan
SEARs	Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements
SIA	Social Impact Assessment
SIMP	Social Impact Management Plan

[Section 1.5](#) includes a list of terms used in this Guideline.

1. Introduction

State significant projects can impact people in many ways, both positive and negative. By identifying and understanding these social impacts, we can create the right responses to avoid, mitigate or reduce negative impacts, and capitalise on positive impacts.

Every State significant project is subject to a social impact assessment (SIA). In this process, 'social impacts' are the consequences that people experience when a new project brings change. For the purposes of the SIA, 'people' could be individuals, households, groups, communities, businesses or organisations.

The SIA process identifies, predicts, evaluates and develops responses to social impacts as part of an integrated assessment that also considers environmental, economic, social and cultural impacts. This is a process that assesses your project from the perspective of people - meaning your development is more likely to be socially sustainable. Definitions for the terms in **Figure 1** are within [Section 3.3.4](#).

The SIA is one input to a broader environmental impact assessment (EIA) process. The EIA is reported through an environmental impact statement (EIS), which details the potential environmental impacts and mitigation measures for certain types of development. All State significant projects, and most designated developments, require an EIS as part of the approval process.

The requirement to undertake an SIA will be explicitly noted within the Planning Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements (SEARs); however, undertaking an SIA is considered best practice whether required by the SEARs or not.



Figure 1 SIA places people at the heart of planning

This Guideline is designed to help proponents with the SIA process. It draws on the agreed principles and frameworks of various international institutions, including the International Association for Impact Assessment and the Interorganizational Committee on Principles and Guidelines for Social Impact Assessment.

SIA is not a one-size-fits-all process – social impacts may be both positive and negative, direct and indirect, or tangible and intangible. The SIA should be targeted and proportionate to the nature and scale of likely project impacts, and to the project's context. This Guideline details how social impacts should be identified, evaluated and responded to, giving proponents and the community greater certainty and transparency to potentially achieve a variety of mutually beneficial outcomes.

The Guideline provides:

- a rigorous framework to identify, evaluate and respond to social impacts
- guidance on meaningful, respectful and effective community engagement on social impacts from project planning to post-approval
- the means to obtain quality, relevant information and analysis for decision-makers
- advice on how the SIA can inform ongoing engagement, project refinement, monitoring and adaptive management.

State significant projects

A State significant project is a type of development under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act). It may be either:

- State significant development (SSD)
- State significant infrastructure (SSI)
- critical State significant infrastructure.¹

The EP&A Act requires State significant projects to be subject to development consent or approval and sets a framework for the assessment and determination of applications for these projects. [Section 2](#) summarises this process.

1.1 Benefits

Using this Guideline during the SIA process will:

- help proponents to understand what is required to meet the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment's expectations
- give the community comfort that their concerns and perspectives are considered early
- build higher levels of community appreciation, or 'social licence', for projects
- reduce project risks and costs related to unplanned or reactive management of social impacts
- enhance a proponent's corporate reputation, helping to build community trust
- create better proponent-community relations and more socially sustainable outcomes
- streamline assessment processes by reducing Departmental requests for more information.
- better integrate the SIA and EIA.



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¹ Categories of development that may be declared SSD or SSI are listed in Schedules 1 and 3 of State Environmental Planning Policy (State and Regional Development) 2011 (SRD SEPP). Projects declared to be SSD, SSI or Critical State significant infrastructure are listed in Schedules 2, 4 and 5 of the SRD SEPP.

1.2 Using this Guideline

This Guideline explains how you should assess likely social impacts for State significant projects under the EP&A Act. While the EP&A Act has legislative requirements for SSD that differ to those for SSI, you can use this Guideline for all State significant projects, as the consent authority or Minister will need to consider the likely social impacts of a proposed development.

Among other things, the EP&A Act aims to promote the social and economic welfare of the community and facilitate ecologically sustainable development. It does this by integrating relevant economic, environmental and social considerations in planning and assessment decisions. It also allows for the community to participate in this process.

These objectives are the foundation for the purpose of the SIA. To meet the requirements of the Act, we expect this Guideline to be used by:

- proponents preparing SIA reports for State significant projects
- departmental assessment officers reviewing and assessing an SIA
- community members or interest groups who wish to understand SIA requirements and how to participate in the SIA process.

This Guideline replaces the *Social impact assessment guideline for State significant mining, petroleum production, and extractive industry development* (2017) and should be used for all State significant projects, including modifications. Transitional arrangements for the introduction of this Guideline are available [here](#).

Other resources

A **technical supplement** sets out technical guidance including worked examples, social impact prompts for various development types, methods for collating and analysing social data, methods for evaluating significance, and requirements for mitigation, monitoring and adaptive management. The supplement will be updated to include best-practice examples and new research.

The **Community Participation Plan** (CPP) will also be of interest. The CPP sets out the Department's approach to community participation including within the approval process.

In limited circumstances, you may prefer a methodology that differs from this Guideline. If this is the case, discuss this with the Department early, before lodging a request for SEARs.

1.3 When to undertake an SIA

Your project will begin with a scoping phase that considers potential impacts and will likely include some community engagement. Once you have completed this phase, you will submit a scoping report to the Department with a request for SEARs. The SEARs will likely require an SIA to be completed in line with this Guideline.

The SIA process will begin during project scoping, when you should determine the size and scale of likely social impacts. Projects likely to have minimal impacts will require a simpler SIA; for other projects a more complex SIA process will be required. [Section 3](#) and [Section 4](#) describe the three phases of the SIA process.

1.4 SIA principles

Effective SIA practice is as much about the approach you will take to collect, assess and analyse information to inform findings as it is about the final report.

The principles in **Table 2** will support an evidence-based approach to SIA – this table will be a useful reference throughout the process. You may wish to summarise how the SIA adheres to these principles in the SIA report. If any of these principles are not relevant (for example, because of project scale) explain why.

Table 2 Principles to guide the SIA process²

Principles	Description
Action-oriented	Defines specific actions to deliver practical, achievable and effective outcomes for people.
Adaptive	Establishes systems to respond to new or different circumstances to support continuous improvement.
Distributive equity	Considers how different groups will experience social impacts differently (particularly vulnerable and marginalised groups, and future generations compared with current generations).
Human-rights oriented	Exercises due diligence to identify and address any impacts on people's human rights, including access to grievance and remedy mechanisms.
Impartial	Uses fair, unbiased research methods and follows relevant ethical standards.
Inclusive	Seeks to hear, understand, respect and document the perspectives of all potentially affected people. It uses respectful, meaningful and effective engagement activities tailored to the needs of those being engaged (for example, being culturally sensitive and accessible).
Integrated	Uses and references relevant information and analysis from other assessments to avoid duplicating assessment. It supports effective integration of social, economic and environmental considerations in decision-making.
Life-cycle focus	Seeks to understand potential impacts (including cumulative impacts) at all project stages, from pre-construction to post-closure/operation commencement.
Material	Identifies which potential social impacts matter the most for people and/or pose the greatest risk/opportunity to those expected to be affected.
Precautionary	If there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage (including harm to people), a lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.
Proportionate	Ensures the scope and scale of the SIA corresponds to the scope and scale of the potential social impacts.
Rigorous	Uses appropriate, accepted social science methods and robust evidence from authoritative and trustworthy sources. (Appendix B provides advice on appropriate skills and experience for SIA authors.)
Transparent	Explains, justifies and makes available information, methods and assumptions so that people can see how their input has been considered.

² Adapted from Vanclay F. 2003. 'International principles for social impact assessment', *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 21(1), 5-12. <https://doi.org/10.3152/147154603781766491>; and Vanclay F. et al. 2015. *Social impact assessment: Guidance for assessing and managing the social impacts of projects*. International Association for Impact Assessment. https://www.iaia.org/uploads/pdf/SIA_Guidance_Document_IAIA.pdf.

1.5 Guideline language

This Guideline uses words such as ‘should’ or ‘suggested’, rather than prescriptive terms such as ‘must’ or ‘will’. This allows for a nuanced approach and reflects the range of development types that the Guideline applies to.

This Guideline emphasises a high-quality process and high-quality outcomes. It allows for information gleaned during the SIA process to be used for other purposes, such as engagement, project risk assessment and project benefit realisation. You should demonstrate that you have satisfied the provisions in this Guideline; as noted earlier, any deviation and justification for doing so should be discussed with the Department early in the process. The SIA process uses terms that may have a different meaning in everyday language. **Table 3** clarifies what these terms mean within the context of this Guideline.

Table 3 Terms used in this Guideline

Term	Meaning for the purposes of SIA Guideline
Application	An application seeking development consent/approval for a State significant project or an application to modify an approved State significant project consent/approval (including concept plan) under the EP&A Act.
Community	Anyone affected by or interested in State significant projects in NSW, including individuals, community groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, representative bodies, businesses, local government and stakeholder groups (defined below).
Engagement	Actions to encourage community participation in the assessment of State significant projects.
Management-based mitigation	Actions or measures that satisfactorily avoid or mitigate potential negative social impacts by implementing known management approaches.
Matter	An element of the environment that may be affected by a State significant project (for example, air, amenity, biodiversity or economic or social matters).
Mitigation	Actions or measures to reduce adverse social impacts of a State significant project.
People	Individuals, households, groups, communities, businesses and organisations.
Performance-based mitigation	Actions or measures that achieve an appropriate social outcome, without specifying how the outcome will be achieved.
Prescriptive-based mitigation	Actions or measures that must be taken, such as a known best-practice technology, design or management approach, to mitigate the social impact.
Proponents	Those seeking approval for a State significant project, including applicants.
Scoping worksheet	A tool to identify likely impacts and the level of assessment required to evaluate the significance of impacts including social impacts.
Secretary	The Planning Secretary of the Department or their delegate.
Scoping meeting	A meeting between the proponent and the Department at the start of a State significant project.
Scoping report	A report submitted by the proponent to the Department after the scoping meeting, accompanied by a request for SEARs.
Social impacts	The matters listed in Section 3.3.2 and Section 3.3.4 of this Guideline.
Stakeholder group	A group or organisation that represents several people with an interest in a State significant project.

2. Overview

The SIA process is a component of the EIA process that identifies, assesses and proposes management for relevant matters in accordance with the EP&A Act.

The SIA process can include two phases (Phase 1 and 2) that together form the process of analysing and responding to likely social impacts. Phase 3 is a process for social impact management. **Figure 2** describes each phase, its purpose and how each aligns with the assessment process. **Figure 3** expands on activities and outputs within each SIA phase.

In most situations the Phase 1 SIA will be followed by a Phase 2 which completes the SIA Report. In some exceptional circumstances a Phase 1 SIA Report may be all that is needed; if so, it should consider the requirements of an SIA Report (in full) to a level that is appropriate for the project. This would then be provided to the Department with the Scoping Report.

This Guideline, however, is structured for the majority of projects that will go beyond a Phase 1 SIA Report.

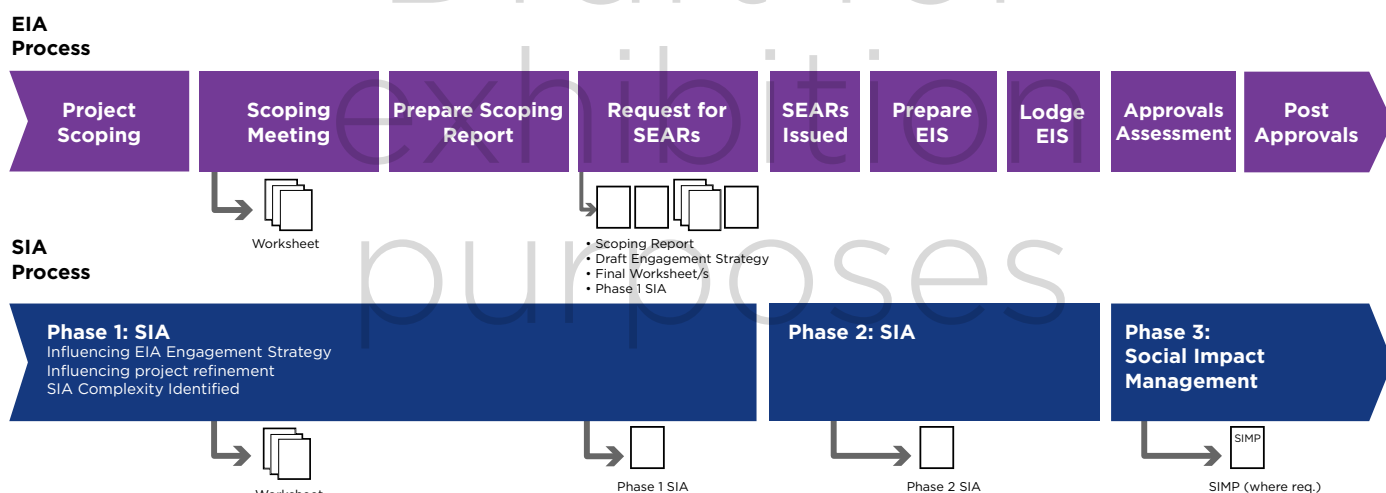


Figure 2 The SIA process aligned with the assessment process

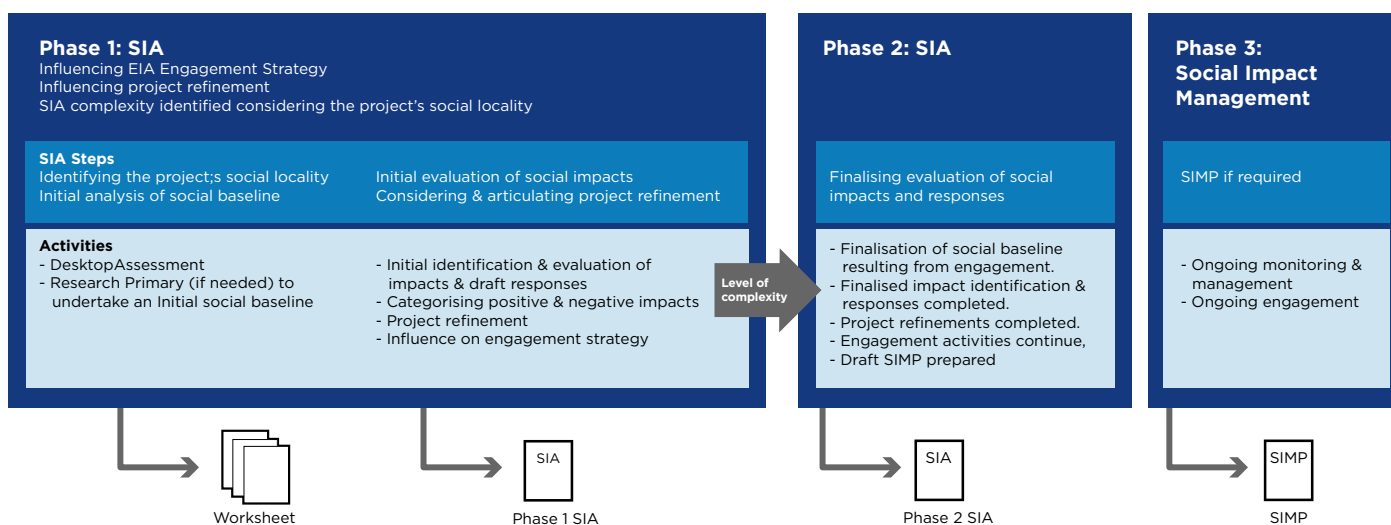


Figure 3 The SIA process in detail

2.1 Support technical supplement

This guideline is supported by a separate technical supplement. The technical supplement provides more guidance on each aspect described in this guideline, and also provides examples to assist proponents and practitioners.

2.2 Alignment with other process

As a process that helps to reduce project risks, the SIA process should align with other project management and funding stages. Proponents often consider social impacts early in a project; these investigations can inform the SIA rather than be duplicated for the SIA. NSW Government proponents may commence the SIA process when undertaking strategic business case works, so that a single SIA can be used for both funding and planning approval processes.

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3. SIA reports

3.1 Introduction

SIA reports describe how the project may positively or negatively impact people early in project planning. This early assessment allows you to adjust or refine a project in response to identified community values and to engage with people early, reducing risk of delays from unexpected community responses or unforeseen impacts.

You will start to write your SIA report at the start of project planning, before you interact with the Department. Begin by completing the scoping worksheet (see link to Scoping Worksheet), a decision support tool, before the scoping meeting.

After the scoping meeting, you will prepare a scoping report to request SEARs. You will submit a Phase 1 SIA Report with the scoping report or incorporate it into the scoping report if it is formulating the work plan for completion of the final SIA Report. If you expect the Phase 1 SIA will be the end of the SIA process, create the

Phase 1 SIA report as a standalone document, attached to the scoping report. The Phase 1 SIA report does not need to duplicate project detail covered in the scoping report.

At a minimum, a Phase 1 SIA report should explain the rationale, assumptions and likely evidence to be used in the SIA, as well as next steps and opportunities for community engagement that will inform the Phase 2 SIA. This effectively forms a work plan for Phase 2 SIA, completing the final SIA Report.

If an alternative method for completing the SIA has been agreed with the Department, describe this in the Phase 1 SIA.

Any information provided will be made publicly available during the Department’s assessment process, starting from when the request is lodged for the SEARs.

The SIA should be targeted and proportionate to the nature and scale of the project’s social impacts, and to its locality, as shown in **Figure 4**.



Figure 4 The scalable complexity of SIA

3.2 Modifications

Your modification may be categorised as:

- Scenario A – a modification of more than minor environmental impact, or a modification that changes the terms of an approval (if the State significant project is State significant infrastructure), or
- Scenario B – a modification involving minimal environmental impact.

Modifications that fall into Scenario A are covered by this Guideline in full. Whether an SIA is required for a Scenario B modification depends on the likely impacts of the proposed modification. If the original application included an SIA, and the proposed modification will not result in material change to the impacts identified in the original SIA, further investigation may not be required. In this case, discuss any likely changes to social impacts during the scoping meeting for the modification application.

In terms of a Scenario A modification, if the original application included an SIA, and the modification is likely to increase or change project impacts, use the SIA process to consider the changes to the impacts as a result of the modification. You will not be expected to compile new social baseline data or complete a new SIA; rather, you should focus on updating the existing information and analysis of impacts expected to change as a result of the modification.

If the original approval did not include an SIA Report, an SIA Report will likely be required. You can discuss this with the Department during the scoping meeting.

For either type of modification, you must meet the requirements outlined in **Section 3.3.1** to a level that is appropriate for the project.

3.3 Preparing an SIA report

3.3.1 Required information

The final SIA report will be a combination of findings and analysis from Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the SIA. The staging for each phase, noted below, is considered best practice, but you may choose to stage your SIA process, and the reporting, differently. The SIA Report should cover the following in the final version.

Typically, a Phase 1 SIA will include:

- an understanding of the project's social locality (see [Section 3.3.2](#))
- initial analysis of the defining characteristics of the communities within the project's social locality, including any vulnerable groups (described as the social baseline)
- initial evaluation of likely social impacts for different groups in the social locality
- any project refinements or approaches to project development in the early phases of project planning that will be undertaken in response to likely social impacts
- how the EIS Engagement Strategy will help to identify and assess social impacts
- the proposed approach for undertaking the remainder of the SIA process.

Typically, the Phase 2 SIA Report will:

- predict and analyse the extent and nature of potential social impacts against baseline conditions using accepted social science methods
- evaluate, draw attention to and prioritise the social impacts that are important to people
- develop appropriate and justified responses (i.e. mitigation and enhancement measures) to social impacts, and identify and explain residual social impacts
- propose arrangements to monitor and manage residual social impacts, including unanticipated impacts, over the life of the project (including post-closure phases for mining projects).

The **technical supplement** provides a suggested structure of an SIA report.

The SIA Report will be made publicly available as part of the Department's assessment process in accordance with legislative requirements.

3.3.2 Social locality

The social baseline study (see [Section 3.3.8](#)) begins by considering social impacts in the 'social locality'. There is no prescribed meaning or fixed, predefined geographic boundary to a social locality; rather, the social locality should be construed for each project, depending on its nature and its impacts. The term 'social locality' is similar to the idea of an 'area of social influence' that is commonly used in social science practice.

Defining the social locality begins with an understanding the nature of the project, the characteristics of affected communities and how positive and negative impacts may be reasonably perceived or experienced by different people.

Social impacts in and beyond the project's site boundary, both positive and negative, may also be considered during approval processes in terms of public interest and the suitability of the site for the project.

Some State significant projects may have a relatively focused social locality, while others may be spatially and/or temporally dispersed, involving different timeframes and/or multiple areas that require different considerations for different people and community groups. Some projects may involve a longer duration of impacts over multiple areas.

[Figure 5](#) represents a relatively confined social locality given the nature of the project, while [Figure 6](#) represents a more dispersed social locality.

To define and describe the social locality, you should analyse:

- **the scale and nature** of the project; its associated activities including ancillary works and infrastructure; potential direct and indirect impacts (for example, transport and logistics corridors or property acquisitions); and potential cumulative impacts
- **who may be affected** by the project; how they may be affected; their social, cultural and demographic characteristics; their relevant interests and values; the things that differentiate groups (such as cultural diversity) as well as things that they have in common; and the broader community interest
- **whether any vulnerable or marginalised people may be affected** by the project, including people on low incomes; people living with disabilities, chronic medical conditions or in poor health requiring access to services; culturally and linguistically diverse communities; people who are homeless or in insecure housing; people who are unable or unwilling to represent themselves or other vulnerable people such as elderly people, children or single-parent households
- **built or natural features** on or near the project that could be affected, and the intangible values that people may associate with these features, such as a sense of place or belonging, rural character, community cohesion and connection to Country
- **relevant social, cultural, demographic trends or social change processes** occurring now or in the past near the project site and in the broader region – such as how Aboriginal people engage in area (past and present), rental affordability trends, changing employment patterns, shifting land uses or population and demographic changes – and how people have felt or experienced these changes
- **the history** of the proposed project and the area, and any similar experiences people near the project have had, including change prior to, or created by, the planning assessment process; how people reacted to early discussions; and how these discussions and other experiences affected the broader community.

Where the social locality comprises groups of people who are demographically, socially, and/or culturally diverse, or where some groups may be more significantly affected than others, data should be disaggregated and described in detail to illustrate these differences. If these differences are negligible or irrelevant, data may be aggregated.

Not every SIA will be the same. Data collected should be targeted and proportionate to the project's context, and the nature and scale of the project's impacts.

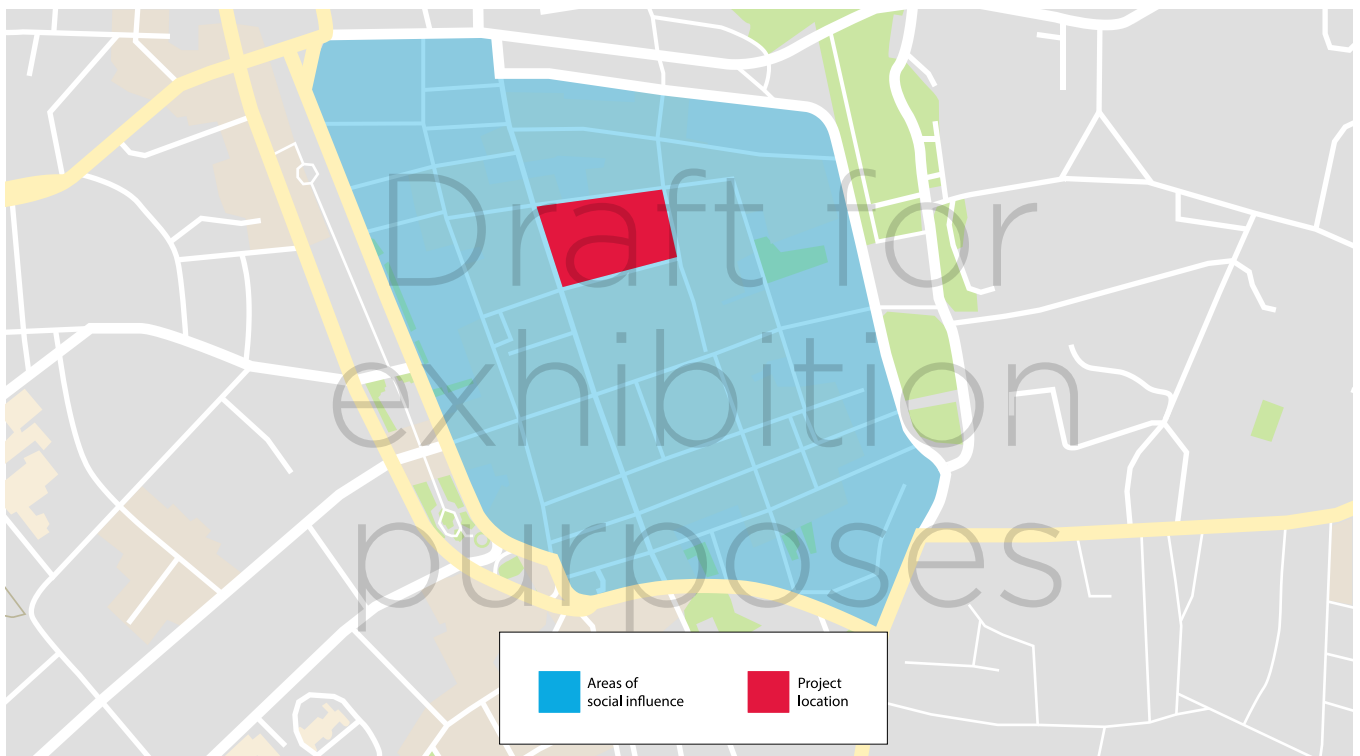


Figure 5 Project's social locality - confined example

Linear projects

Linear projects such as rail lines, roadways or utility services are typically narrow but long, like that illustrated in [Figure 6](#). Analysis should consider the broader area as well as key precincts or areas that will experience a higher level of impact. Surveys of people in a wider region may inform an understanding of their ways of life and livelihoods (for example travel times and employment) and present a broad representation across a larger social locality.

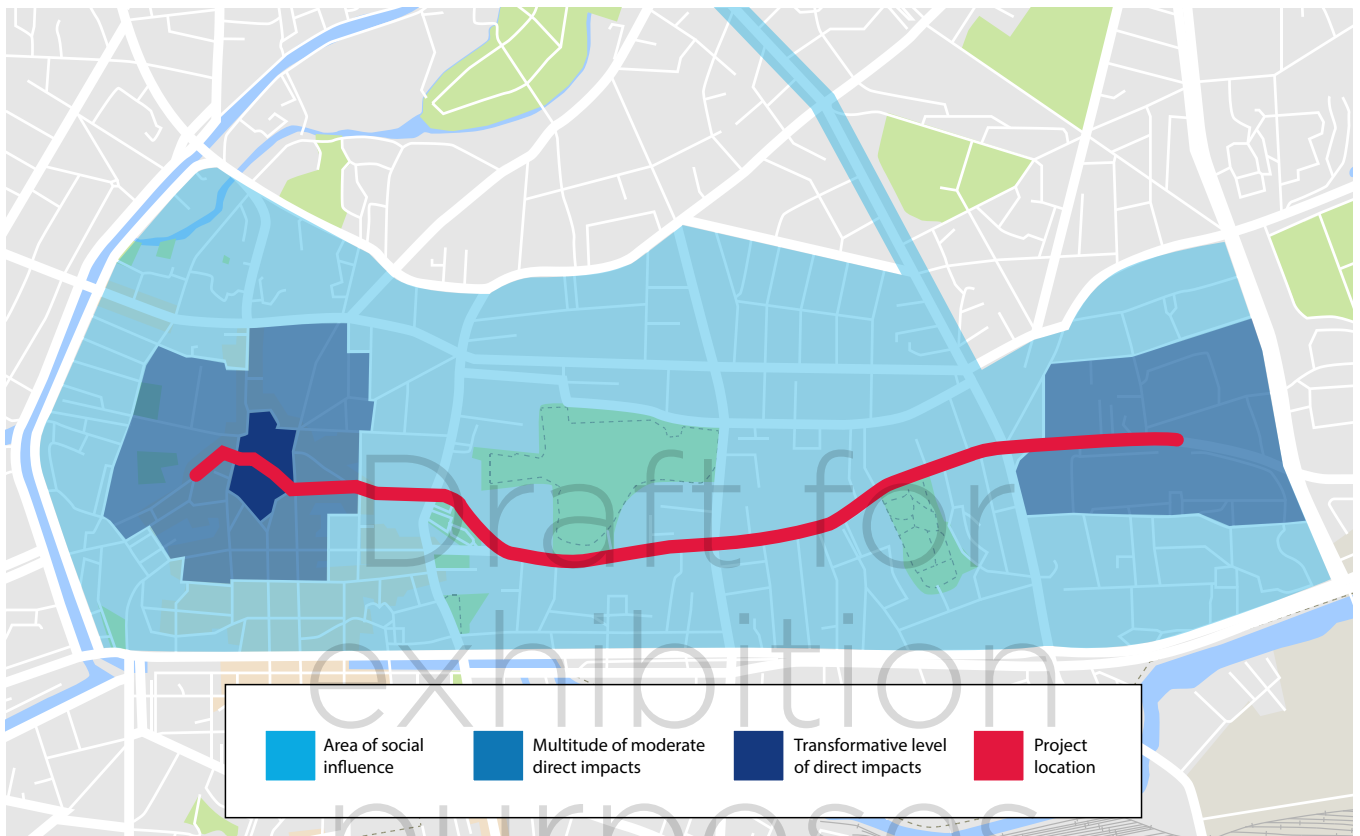


Figure 6 Project social locality - diverse example

3.3.3 Potential social impacts

You should consider possible social enhancement opportunities or benefits, and analyse how they will be distributed. [Figure 8](#) illustrates the process of dealing with positive and negative impacts and [Section 3.3.9](#) to [Section 3.3.11](#) provides more detail.

The scoping worksheet is useful at this point. It assists in project planning and covers social impacts for eight categories and prompts you to consider social impacts in the context of:

- whether the project meets objectives of relevant environmental planning instruments, such as a local environmental plan for SSD,
- what project activities could induce social impacts for which people (referencing technical studies where relevant)
- any other activities that may combine to produce cumulative impacts
- a preliminary assessment of each impact and the proportionate level of assessment
- whether the project design has been refined in response to current findings.

3.3.4 Categorising impacts

A project may change people's lives in various ways. Use the following categories to identify potential social impacts:

- **way of life**, including how people live, how they get around, how they work, how they play, and how they interact each day
- **community**, including composition, cohesion, character, how the community functions and people's sense of place
- **accessibility**, including how people access and use infrastructure, services and facilities, whether provided by a public, private or not-for-profit organisation
- **culture**, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, including shared beliefs, customs, values and stories, and connections to Country, land, waterways, places and buildings
- **health and wellbeing**, including physical and mental health especially for people vulnerable to social exclusion or substantial change, psychological stress resulting from financial or other pressures, and changes to public health overall
- **surroundings**, including ecosystem services such as shade, pollution control, and erosion control, public safety and security, access to and use of the natural and built environment, and aesthetic value and amenity
- **livelihoods**, including people's capacity to sustain themselves through employment or business, whether they experience personal breach or disadvantage, and the distributive equity of impacts and benefits
- **decision-making systems**, particularly whether people experience procedural fairness, can make informed decisions, can meaningfully influence decisions, and can access complaint, remedy and grievance mechanisms.

Some projects may have impacts in all these categories, but others may only have impacts in a few. For example, an influx of workers could affect both 'way of life' and 'community'. Neatly categorising impacts is not as important as identifying and assessing them. The categories simply provide prompts to help you to consider all possible social impacts. You should also consider and assess reasonable fears and aspirations for each of the above categories.

When assessing the nature and scale of social impacts, consider the project's:

- location, including whether it will be densely or sparsely populated, or whether it will be contained within one council boundary or several
- layout and design, for example whether it will be linear or contained within a discrete site
- social locality
- proposed construction and operation methods, and expected duration of each
- local and regional context including dependency on or proximity to other State significant projects or other forms of industry; the community's experience of other projects; and their adaptability and resilience.

Also consider external uncertainties in the economic and social context, such as fluctuations in local or global economies or changing community expectations that cannot be controlled and could alter predicted impacts.

Positive social impacts

You should assess positive social impacts to understand the net impact of a project on people. Be sure to assess the positive social consequences of change (e.g. improved public health resulting from increased public space), rather than simply stating the change itself. Be careful to assess positive impacts impartially and not to overstate or understate them. Positive social impacts may include:

- enhanced community wellbeing from increased jobs and business opportunities or less commuting
 - improved public/community health, environment and wellbeing
 - social development or a stronger sense of place and community cohesion through community investment or shared infrastructure
 - community development initiatives, capacity building and stronger community institutions
 - payments for the provision of services and infrastructure.
-

Negative social impacts

Negative social impacts may include:

- decreased amenity during construction programs affecting jobs and business opportunities
 - increase in dust or noise impacts affecting community health, surroundings and wellbeing
 - alterations to traffic routes and management reducing a community's ability to walk or cycle or their livelihoods, in turn affecting community health and wellbeing
 - changes to land use affecting community character and people's sense of place, inducing a sense of cultural loss by Aboriginal people.
-

Cumulative social impacts

Cumulative social impacts are successive, incremental and combined impacts that can arise from project activities (such as dust and noise), or multiple projects needing similar resources (e.g. skilled labour, housing or water). The most effective way to assess cumulative social impacts is to consider them from the viewpoint of those experiencing them.

Cumulative impacts should be considered if multiple projects are being undertaken in the same place. You should consider 'place impacts' for those projects, and also consider other development underway in the same area.

3.3.5 Refining the project

After considering potential social impacts, the outcomes from engagement activities and lessons learned from other projects, you should refine the project design and explore alternatives that would improve social outcomes both during construction and when the project is complete. Describe changes made to the project design that have been made to the project in the Phase 1 SIA report.

3.3.6 Incorporating EIA elements

The SIA Report includes a social baseline study, predictions and analysis of impacts, evaluation of each impact's significance, and a preliminary monitoring, mitigation and management framework.

For example, relevant environmental studies may predict and model noise and air quality emissions during construction and once completed. Similarly, the economic cost assessment may predict resulting gains or losses from the project. The SIA Report complements these by examining how people might experience these environmental and economic changes and identifies opportunities to respond.

Each study undertaken for an EIA involves discrete processes, you should integrate the results into the relevant SIA Report that you submit as part of an EIS. **Figure 7** illustrates the relationship between the SIA and other specialist studies and how these relate to the EIA.

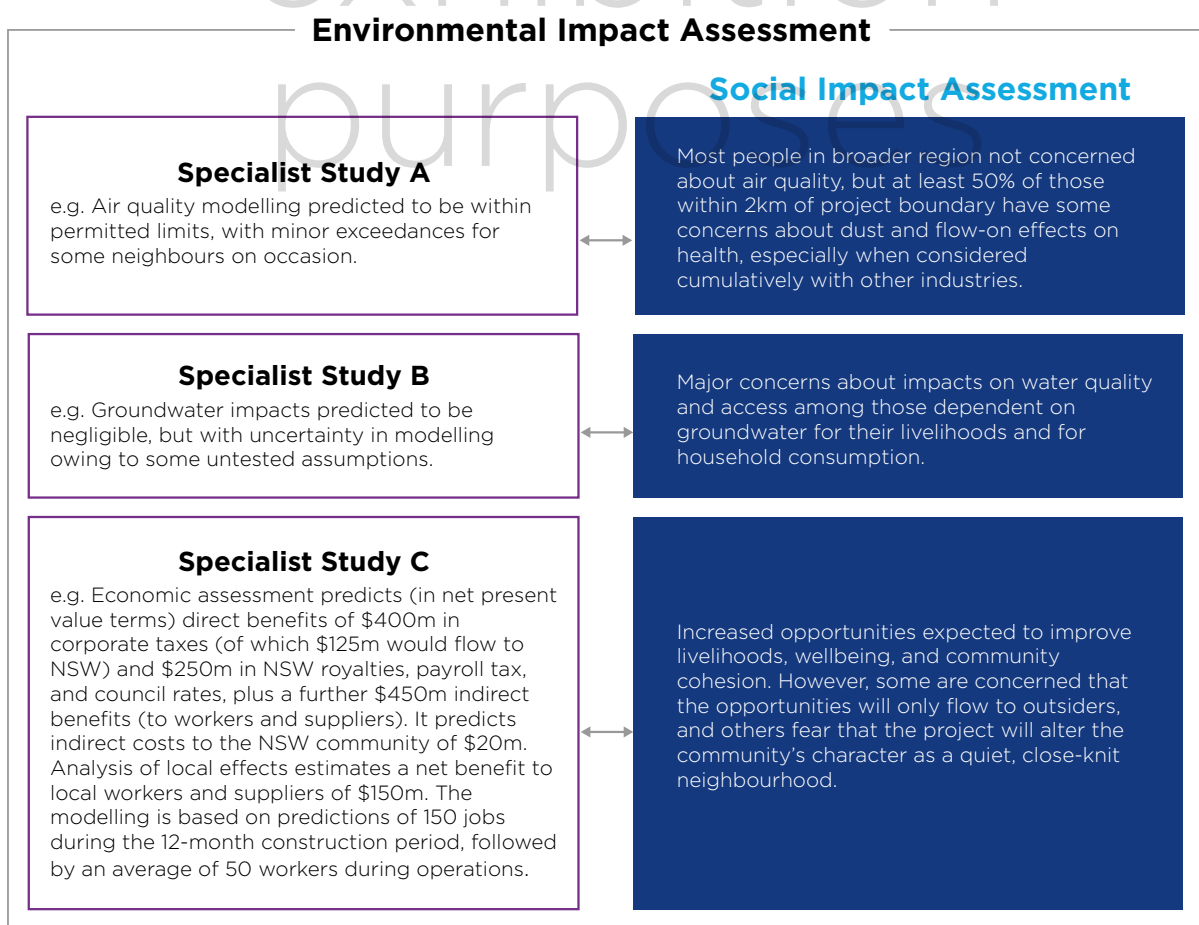


Figure 7 Example relationship between the final SIA Report and other EIS specialist studies

3.3.7 Data collection

Existing data sources such as ABS data, material from similar projects, published research, relevant local, State and Commonwealth strategic plans and policies, or the outcomes from previous community engagement will inform the SIA. These are considered secondary data sources; you may need to seek out primary data from sources such as:

- discussions with State agencies
- interviews, community workshops or focus groups
- written and oral stories, first-hand testimonies or community histories
- community surveys.

For project modifications, data may come from the approved project/s and results from monitoring post-approval.

While community profile data should help you to understand the demographics of the social locality, further analysis will identify distinguishing features and how the community compares to state, regional or district trends.

Collectively, this data will paint a picture of what is important to people. When articulating these values, consider:

- What features of the community, the social locality, and/or the landscape do people value – from urban areas, the sense of community or the accessibility of services, to natural and diverse environments or quiet/vibrant neighbourhoods?

- How do these features influence local people's or businesses' way of life, health or wellbeing?
- How might the project affect these features, and for which groups?
- How could the project be modified to enhance these features and how they affect people's wellbeing?
- Although the project may deliver benefits in the longer term, how might the project be designed to avoid and minimise any short-term adverse impacts?

Information and insights from all sources should be trustworthy, credible, rigorous, up to date and relevant to the social context – for example, regional data may not apply evenly across all communities and may need to be disaggregated locally. Additionally, primary data should be grounded in people's reports of their actual experiences, views and perceptions and informed by details of the project.

3.3.8 Social baseline

The social baseline study describes the social context without the project. It documents the existing social environment, conditions and trends relevant to the impacts identified.

The study is a benchmark against which direct, indirect and cumulative impacts can be predicted and analysed. Tailor the scope and content of the social baseline study to the project context using meaningful indicators and information.

3.3.9 Predicting and analysing social impacts

In describing and analysing the predicted nature and scale of likely social impacts for the lifecycle of the project, you should:

- use accepted, suitable qualitative and quantitative social science research methods, including workshops and focus groups; interviews and surveys; scenario analysis and modelling; comparative studies; literature reviews; trend extrapolations; and risk/opportunity assessment
- engage with people to obtain qualitative data (see [Appendix A](#) for potential research methodologies) and to obtain multiple perspectives from various groups
- consider potential social impacts from the perspectives of potentially affected people rather than from your project's perspective
- proactively include groups that may have been historically marginalised by representing their views in their own words
- acknowledge and account for uncertainties in predictions and data collection by applying sensitivity analysis, ensuring predictions consider any reasonably foreseeable scenarios including the worst case scenario
- comparatively assess positive and negative impacts of the project not proceeding
- use credible, reasonable and justified estimates and assumptions, particularly those that rely on expert judgement
- use comparative studies (where appropriate) to examine the accuracy of assumptions, by considering similarities and differences between your project and other recent projects
- describe and justify the methodologies used to predict and analyse social impacts, assumptions and estimates as well as outcomes of the process.

3.3.10 Evaluating social impacts

You must evaluate the significance of each potential social impact without mitigation or enhancement by giving each a significance rating. Provide evidence to support the evaluation rating to demonstrate that it is impartial and based on relevant research.

Figure 8 illustrates the process of dealing with impacts, by first predicting impacts, refining the project in order to avoid impacts, minimising then mitigating impacts, and finally managing impacts.

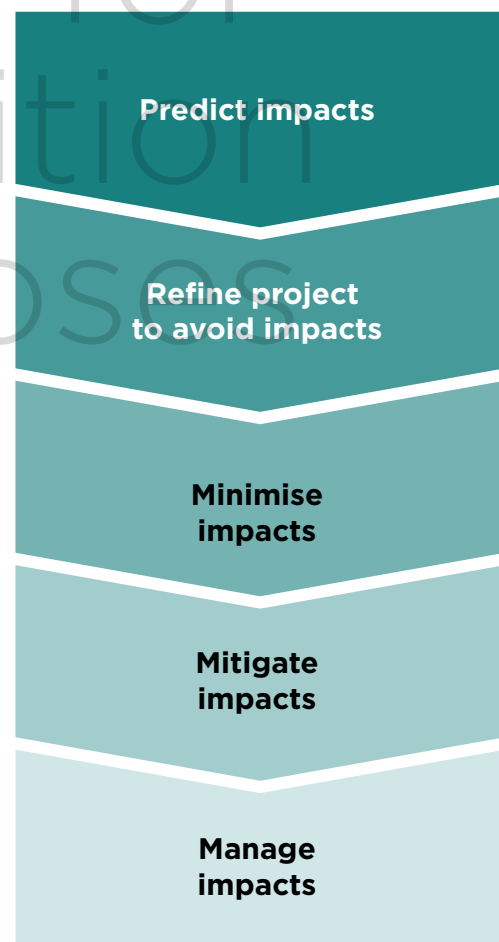


Figure 8 Analysis of positive and negative impacts

3.3.11 Responses

You should summarise any proposed responses to positive and negative social impacts. Mitigation measures for negative impacts should detail when and where the measure applies and how effectiveness will be monitored and maintained. This includes relevant measurable performance criteria and management objectives. For positive social impacts, explain how and when benefits will be achieved, and, if possible, how they can be maintained and enhanced.

3.3.11.1 Responding to negative social impacts

Consider measures to firstly avoid, and secondly minimise, impacts by amending the project design. If neither are possible nor reasonably practicable, consider measures to mitigate impacts. This could include physical barriers to mitigate noise and visual impacts, investment in local health services to meet increasing population needs, investment in community projects or community development funds. Other measures may include strategies for housing, employment strategies, education and training, or benefit-sharing agreements.

It may be appropriate to consider providing material public benefits through a voluntary planning agreement.

Once you have clarified the proposed mitigation measures, re-evaluate the negative social impacts with mitigation using the approach in [Section 3.3.9](#), and describe the expected 'residual impact' – the social impact after mitigation.

3.3.11.2 Responding to positive social impacts

Positive social impacts should be enhanced, particularly within the social locality to distribute benefits equitably. Measures to enhance positive social impacts, often identified as opportunities or benefits, must be able to be implemented and monitored effectively. Ideally, affected communities should be involved in the identification, design and implementation of positive social impacts and help to set relevant indicators and monitoring processes.

Describe any steps required to achieve the positive social impacts. This might include how you will implement a procurement policy that requires a proportion of goods and services to be sourced from local providers, or how a program to hire and retain apprentices throughout a construction project will be implemented.

Strategies to enhance positive social impacts may also help to offset negative impacts. If this is the case, describe and justify any connections.

3.3.12 Social impact management work plan

The SIA process provides a basis for developing a social impact management plan (SIMP). The SEARs may require a preliminary social impact monitoring and management plan to be included in the SIA Report.

4. Social impact management

4.1 Introduction

Any post-approval phase is likely to involve a continuous process of mitigating, monitoring and managing social impacts as they occur. These processes can help to nurture relations with communities and maximise broad community approval, or ‘social licence’.⁴

Social impact conditions of consent may require a SIMP that describes the measures to be implemented and the impacts they will address. The process of implementing and monitoring these measures is known as adaptive management.

Monitoring and adaptive management should aim to protect and enhance the social environment over the life of the project. Project monitoring and management commitments can be integrated into overarching environmental management systems such as ISO 14001 accredited Environmental Management Systems.

4.2 Preparing a SIMP

4.2.1 Objectives

The SIMP should:

- enhance and refine mitigation, enhancement, monitoring and management of social impacts over the life of the project, including unanticipated impacts
- set out how you will continue to seek ongoing feedback from the community as part of adaptive management processes.

The SIMP should describe how the requirements of performance-based and prescriptive conditions will be implemented and monitored through a robust monitoring and auditing program. The SIMP should set out elements such as indicators, baseline values, frequencies, triggers, stakeholders and responses.

4.2.2 Suggested SIMP inclusions

While there is no required format for a SIMP, it should:

- include a project summary
- illustrate how social impacts were identified, plans for mitigation or enhancement, and management commitments
- explain how engagement informed the SIMP, detail the engagement strategy and future activities, and describe how these will inform monitoring and management
- provide measurable and defined targets and actions for monitoring, reporting, auditing and reviewing progress, with clear numbering, wording and commitments to locations, timing, frequency, method and responsibilities
- commit to measure results and report these findings via the project website
- include how shortfalls will be addressed – for example, if a target is not being met or an impact is being inadequately managed, the SIMP should indicate steps to address and report on the shortfall.

A SIMP may also include other components required under a project’s conditions of consent and may include overarching proponent commitments that will be upheld during the construction and operational phases of the project.

The document and commitments should be written in plain English that the community can understand and should be made available online. Depending on the cultural diversity in the social locality, it may need to be translated into other languages.

If the SIMP incorporates mitigation measures through other plans such as noise or air quality management plans, provide cross-references to these commitments, and avoid duplication.

⁴ Parsons R, Moffat K. 2014. Integrating impact and relational dimensions of social licence and social impact assessment. *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*, 32:4, 273-282. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14615517.2014.936107>

Draft for exhibition purposes

Appendices

Appendix A – Community engagement

Respectful, inclusive and meaningful engagement is a fundamental part of SIA, alongside other research activities. It provides first-hand insights into what people value and how they expect a project to affect them. It also helps to focus the scope of the SIA on the things that really matter.

Particular attention is needed when engaging with vulnerable and marginalised groups to understand how they might experience and reasonably perceive social impacts. You should provide multiple opportunities for people to participate.

Engagement and public participation is not a substitute for good evidence-based SIA; rather, it is a component of it.⁵

Community engagement actions

- Consider the community engagement objectives
- Use outcomes of engagement to maximise community wellbeing and avoid or effectively mitigate adverse impacts
- Engage with a diversity of people, including vulnerable and marginalised groups.
- Use appropriate and specific levels and techniques of engagement, based on your analysis of the community and how they are best engaged
- Follow additional protocols for engaging with Aboriginal people.

Community engagement objectives

You should aim to:

- ensure potentially affected people are *identified* and have enough understanding of the proposed project, how it may affect them, the EIA process, and how they can participate in it
- collect qualitative and quantitative *data, evidence and insights* for scoping the SIA in ways that maximise diversity and representativeness of views
- understand the interests people have in the project and how potential impacts may be *experienced from their perspectives*
- consider the views of people in a meaningful way, and use these insights to *inform project planning* and design, mitigation and enhancement measures, and monitoring and management frameworks
- provide opportunities for people to collaborate on project design matters and provide input into the identification and consideration of preferred solutions
- confirm data, assumptions, findings and recommendations
- ensure people know how their *input and views have been taken into account*, and to help illustrate what actions or mitigating measures will be put into place to address concerns
- help people understand how other specialist studies prepared for the EIA (for example, air quality or noise), and any associated proposed mitigation measures, address social impacts
- respect people's privacy, allowing them to communicate their views anonymously if they desire.

You should consider how to use what you learn from engagement to inform the final project design so that it maximises community wellbeing and avoids or genuinely mitigates adverse impacts.

Which people and groups to engage with will depend on the project context and the different linkages and networks that connect them to the project. They are unlikely to fall within a single, clear, geographical boundary. At the very least, where people express an interest in the project, they are identifying themselves as being eligible for inclusion in engagement activities for SIA. However, the interests that different people have in a project will vary, as will the level of engagement different people may need.

Common research methods to help identify who should be engaged, and for mapping people to impacts, include stakeholder mapping, stakeholder matrix, values mapping, issues mapping, and community visioning.



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Industry and Environment

Proponents should engage with a broad cross-section of people in a manner consistent with the SIA principles identified and explained in [Table 2](#). To ensure the SIA is not disproportionately influenced by those with more power, people at all levels of the community should be included, from grassroots to leadership levels, and from informal, community-based organisations to formal institutions. General categories of people to engage include:

- existing and in-migrating residents and businesses, particularly those near the project location and in nearby localities, or any other potential users of the project, for example if it is a rail project, then future transport users need to be considered
- Aboriginal people and groups, especially those with a cultural connection to the project location, and including traditional owners or custodians who can speak for Country, native title holders or registered native title claimants and relevant Local Aboriginal Land Council/s
- employees, contractors and suppliers who use the area regularly
- community, industry, business, cultural and environment organisations, advocacy groups, and peak bodies
- public and private service and infrastructure providers and regulatory agencies (especially local, state, and federal government-funded education, health, community, and social services)
- elected representatives and other community leaders.

This analysis will be an important factor in deciding the levels of engagement and appropriate techniques needed to meet the abovementioned SIA objectives.

⁵ Freudenberg WR & Olsen D. 1983. 'Public interest and political abuse: Public participation in social impact assessment. *Journal of the Community Development Society*, 14(2), 67-82.

How to engage

Engagement during the SIA process may involve varying levels of participation and require the use of several different techniques. The levels of participation range from sharing information, to collecting information and insights, to involving the community in decision-making and co-design.

The choice of level and techniques should depend on the objectives of that engagement. For instance, when the objective is to explain the results and recommendations of a technical study so that people understand how they might be affected, information-sharing techniques such as newsletters, social media, and meetings may be enough.

Where the objective is to involve people in decision-making, more participatory techniques such as interviews, focus groups, workshops, community visioning, and co-design would be appropriate. To determine the levels and techniques of engagement for the SIA, proponents should consider:

- the scale of the project's social locality (refer to [Section 3.2](#))
- the degree of diversity among potentially affected and interested people, and the extent to which they are expected to be affected or interested
- the range and types of impacts involved and their relative importance
- the timing and context, noting that stakeholders and their interests can change over time with different project stages and phases of the EIA and SIA
- the needs of different audiences (for example, cultural appropriateness, capacity to participate, communication styles and/or preferences, barriers to participation), including: Aboriginal people; younger and older people; people with disability; people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities; people who are vulnerable, socio-economically disadvantaged or otherwise marginalised; and any other 'difficult-to-reach' groups
- opportunities to rely on or integrate with other engagement activities planned for the EIA to avoid duplication and manage 'consultation fatigue'.

Table 4 outlines engagement techniques typically relevant for SIA.



Table 4 Useful engagement techniques for social impact assessment

Level of participation	Engagement technique	Purpose in SIA
Sharing information	Impromptu discussions and informal conversations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">identifying affected and interested people, groups, organisations and communities
	Public displays, briefings, information sessions and public meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">helping people to understand the proposal and the social impact assessment
	Open days and site visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">addressing questions, concerns and complaints
	Contact points (for example, hotlines, websites, shopfronts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">demonstrating early engagement
	Websites, direct mail/email/SMS, fact sheets, newsletters and webinars	
Consulting to collect information and insights	Surveys and interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">identifying and predicting social impacts
	Community consultative committee or community liaison and advisory groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">collecting data, evidence and insightsdemonstrating early engagementconfirming data, assumptions and findings
	Online forums	<ul style="list-style-type: none">involving marginalised groups
	Social media	
Collaborating in decision-making	Workshops and focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">co-design, or collaborating in the design of project elements
	Deliberative forums/workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none">identifying and predicting social impacts
	Citizen panels	<ul style="list-style-type: none">collaborating in the development of monitoring, mitigation and management measures and actions
	Citizens' assemblies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">involving marginalised groups

When to engage

Since social impacts can begin with rumours of a prospective project or at first contact, proponents should commence engagement during the early project planning and development phases. Engagement will then generally continue through the project construction and operational phases, and into closure and post-closure phases where relevant.

Proponents should provide a draft engagement strategy for discussion with the Department at the Scoping Meeting.

Engaging with Aboriginal people

Engagement with Aboriginal people for SIA should recognise and respect their rights and be culturally appropriate. In practice, this means:

- applying relevant protocols for Aboriginal knowledge
- acknowledging and assessing both tangible and intangible forms of cultural heritage
- ensuring free, prior, and informed consent
- engaging traditional owners or custodians who can speak for Country
- allowing Aboriginal decision-making processes to function effectively
- avoiding conflict between engagement activities and cultural practices (for example, 'sorry business')

- engaging in places, at times, and in ways that encourage participation
- ensuring that engagement is undertaken by people with appropriate skills and experience.

A key objective of engaging with Aboriginal peoples for SIA – as distinct from Cultural Heritage Assessment – is to help identify the potential for a project to cause intangible harm through **'cultural or spiritual loss'**. This is defined as: loss or diminution of traditional attachment to the land or connection to country, or loss of rights to gain spiritual sustenance from the land. Equally, engaging Aboriginal peoples for SIA should aim to identify opportunities for cultural or spiritual growth.

The Office of Environment and Heritage's Aboriginal cultural heritage consultation requirements for proponents (2010) should be referred to for guidance when consulting with Aboriginal people about Aboriginal cultural heritage matters specifically, and on social impacts more broadly. In addition, please refer to the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Engagement Toolkit* (2012).



Appendix B – Authors of SIA documents

To realise the benefits of SIA, suitably qualified and experienced practitioner/s should be involved in the project scoping and planning phase. This will allow them to investigate and evaluate the stakeholders' perceptions and help to refine the proposed project design.

To ensure the SIA is targeted and proportionate to the project's context, and the nature and scale of its likely impacts an SIA practitioner should be used where the project's context and scale of its impacts are complex. For projects with minimal social impacts, an SIA specialist may not be required.

[Table 6](#) provides a guide on the minimal level of expertise required throughout the evolution of SIA and project development.

Table 5 Authors of SIA documents

Document	Proponent/proponent's study team [#]	Suitably qualified person [*]
Phase 1 SIA	✓	
Phase 2 SIA (resulting in the final SIA Report)		✓
SIMP		✓

[#] A successful SIA process would enable the proponent to demonstrate how Phase 1 has influenced the project design (i.e. project refinement). Consequently, the study team should have the ability to influence the project design and a level of seniority to objectively and accurately consider social impacts in accordance with **Section 3.3.9 to Section 3.3.11**.

While it is not necessary for this person to have substantial competence in social science, it would be beneficial.

^{*} A Suitably Qualified Person must have:

- suitable **qualifications** in a relevant social science discipline (e.g. sociology, human geography, anthropology, communication), and/or
- proven **experience** over multiple years and substantial **competence** in social science research methods and SIA practices.

Outline the lead author's qualifications and experience in the SIA Report. They should be a member of a relevant professional organisation, such as the International Association of Impact Assessment, Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand, Planning Institute of Australia, and/or Australasian Evaluation Society. Members of professional organisations agree to a code of ethics and professional conduct, ensuring they apply relevant principles and demonstrate integrity and competence in professional practice.

⁶ For further information on ethical considerations, see: National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council and the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee. 2015. National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia; and Vancly F, Baines J & Taylor CN. 2013. Principles for ethical research involving humans: Ethical professional practice in impact assessment Part I. Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal, 31(4), 243-253.

The author should also follow relevant ethical considerations that apply to research involving people.⁶ This ensures that research is conducted in a responsible, safe, secure, impartial, and respectful manner. Safeguards should be put in place, and documented, to ensure that the process and the outcomes provide an impartial assessment and avoid potential conflicts of interest.

The lead author should provide a signed declaration indicating:

- the date on which the assessment was completed
- that the SIA contains all information relevant to the SIA for the project
- that none of the information in the SIA is false or misleading.



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NSW Department of Planning,
Industry and Environment

Appendix C – Review questions

Proponents should use these review questions to check that they have fulfilled the requirements of this Guideline. The Department will also refer to these questions in undertaking its assessment.

Table 6 Review questions

General	
1	Does the lead author of the SIA Report meet the qualification and experience requirements?
2	Has the lead author of the SIA Report provided a signed declaration certifying that the assessment does not contain false or misleading information?
3	Would a reasonable person judge the SIA Report to be impartial, rigorous, and transparent?
Project's social locality and social baseline	
4	Does the SIA Report identify and describe all the different social groups that may be affected by the project?
5	Does the SIA Report identify and describe all the built or natural features that have value or importance for people, and explain why people value those features?
6	Does the SIA Report identify and describe historical, current, and expected social trends or social changes for people in the locality, including their experiences with this project and other major development projects?
7	Does the social baseline study include appropriate justification for each element, and provide evidence that the elements reflect both relevant literature and the full diversity of views and potential experiences?
8	Does the social baseline study demonstrate social-science research methods and explain any significant methodological or data limitations?
Identification and description of social impacts	
9	Does the SIA Report adequately describe potential social impacts (whether negative, positive, tangible, intangible, perceived, and/or cumulative) from the perspectives of how people may experience them, and explain the research used to identify them? Where the assessment is partially complete, and expected to be completed in Phase 2 SIA, has this been explained?
10	Does the SIA Report apply the precautionary principle to social impacts, and consider how they may be experienced differently by different people and groups (i.e. distributive equity)?
11	Does the SIA Report describe how the preliminary analysis influenced both the project design and EIS Engagement Strategy?
Community engagement	
12	Were the extent and nature of engagement activities appropriate and sufficient to canvass all relevant views, including those of vulnerable or marginalised groups?
13	How have the views, concerns, and insights of affected and interested people influenced both the project design and each element of the SIA Report (e.g. the social baseline, predicting impacts, and mitigation/enhancement measures)?

Table 6 Review questions

Predicting and analysing social impacts	
14	Does the SIA Report impartially focus on the most material social impacts at all stages of the project life cycle, without any omissions or misrepresentations?
15	Does the SIA Report identify the matters to which the precautionary principle could or should be reasonably applied?
16	Does the SIA Report analyse the distribution of both positive and negative social impacts, and the equity of this distribution?
17	Does the SIA Report identify its assumptions, and include sensitivity analysis and alternative scenarios (including 'worst-case' and 'no project' scenarios where relevant)?
Evaluating significance	
18	Do the evaluations of significance of social impacts impartially represent how people in each identified social group can expect to experience the project, including any cumulative effects?
19	Are the evaluations of significance disaggregated to consider the potentially different experiences for different people or groups, especially vulnerable groups?
Responses, monitoring and management	
20	Does the SIA Report propose responses (i.e. mitigations and enhancements) that are tangible, deliverable by the proponent, likely to be durably effective, and directly related to the respective impact(s)?
21	How can people be confident that social impacts will be monitored and reported in ways that are reliable, effective, and trustworthy?
22	How will the proponent adaptively manage social impacts and respond to unanticipated events, breaches, grievances, and non-compliance?



Photography:

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