



DISCUSSION PAPER:

A preliminary framework for expedited environmental assessment

MARCH 2026



EAO

Environmental
Assessment Office





A Message from the Office of the Chief Executive Assessment Officer

British Columbia is navigating a period of significant global economic change, and the Province has responded by directing provincial regulators to streamline decision-making on major projects and infrastructure. The provincial government has determined that advancing provincially significant projects while upholding regulatory standards, is increasingly critical to the long-term prosperity of British Columbia.

The Environmental Assessment Office plays an important role in the regulatory continuum for major projects. The EAO is the provincial agency responsible for the environmental assessment and authorization of major projects in British Columbia. By providing a stable, transparent and predictable process, the EAO supports sustainability in B.C., including protecting the environment and fostering a sound economy, while supporting reconciliation. Projects with an environmental assessment certificate provide significant investment confidence and certainty for proponents. The EAO's mandate is a critical component of the government's broader economic objective to attract investment and build a strong economy that works for all British Columbians.

While the *Environmental Assessment Act* continues to set out the standard pathway for environmental assessments in B.C., the *Infrastructure Projects Act*, administered by the Ministry of Infrastructure, enables a new, expedited environmental assessment (EA) process to be used on a case-by-case basis. A project that is reviewed under this expedited pathway is not guaranteed to receive certification. The EAO's purpose of fostering a sound economy, protecting the environment and supporting reconciliation remains unchanged and central to this work.

The EAO is seeking feedback from First Nations, industry and interested parties on a proposed approach for an expedited environmental assessment framework, outlined in this discussion paper. The EAO is committed to undertaking a rigorous engagement and consultation and cooperation process to ensure that an expedited environmental assessment process serves the best interests of British Columbia.

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1. Purpose of this Document

The purpose of this document is to describe the proposed framework for an expedited environmental assessment (EA) process and to solicit feedback to inform the development of a future regulation and guidance. Input from multiple perspectives is essential to ensure the final framework is robust, transparent and serves the public interest.

As part of the Province's broader strategy to accelerate infrastructure delivery under the *Infrastructure Projects Act*, the EAO is introducing an expedited EA pathway for designated projects that demonstrate advanced readiness. This pathway is accessed through a **Project Designation Process** administered by the Ministry of Infrastructure, which serves as the mechanism through which the Province evaluates a project's suitability for an expedited EA.

Where appropriate, a project designation allows for the use of the proposed **expedited Environmental Assessment (EA) process**. This 20-month pathway preserves rigorous assessment steps and ensures that well-prepared major projects advance while upholding environmental, economic, social, cultural and health values. The success of an expedited EA is predicated on proponents maintaining an advanced state of readiness throughout the assessment process.

2. Project Designation Process

2.1 The Infrastructure Projects Act: Framework and Context

The *Infrastructure Projects Act* (IPA) establishes a provincial framework to accelerate the delivery of major infrastructure by providing a process for designated projects to access a variety of streamlined regulatory processes¹. Under the IPA, the Minister of Infrastructure may designate two categories of projects:

- Provincial Capital Projects: Core public infrastructure, such as bridges and tunnels in the context of environmental assessments, delivered by the Province or its partners.²
- Provincially Significant Projects: A broad range of infrastructure delivered by Crown corporations, local governments, First Nations or private entities. These types of projects that may require an environmental assessment include energy security infrastructure, critical minerals projects or major public infrastructure.

¹ <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/govtogetherbc/engagement/infrastructure/>

² Other types of public infrastructure projects that fall outside the environmental assessment regulatory framework, such as schools and hospitals, may be designated for other streamlined authorizations.



2.2 The Project Designation Process

The IPA Project Designation Process is the mechanism for designating eligible projects and determining which regulatory tools, such as an expedited EA, are appropriate for a specific project³. This process, led by the Ministry of Infrastructure is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Project Designation Process

Step	Role of Ministry of Infrastructure	Role of EAO
1: Identify	Verifying Ministry notifies Ministry of Infrastructure of project that may be a candidate for designation under IPA.	
2: Assessment	Evaluates project against eligibility requirements. ⁴	Provide technical recommendation to inform Ministry of Infrastructure determination on whether project is suitable candidate for expedited EA.
3: Designation	Minister of Infrastructure makes recommendation to Cabinet. If approved, access to specified opportunities (e.g., expedited EA) authorized.	Receives authorization to initiate an expedited EA.
4: Implementation	Publishes designation information.	Initiates expedited EA.

To support the implementation of the project designation process, the EAO is consulting and cooperating with First Nations and engaging other participants in environmental assessments on what the EAO should be evaluating to inform the recommendation on whether a proposed project is suitable for expedited EA (step 2 above). This ensures the criteria used to recommend a project for designation, and the methods used to assess it afterwards, will meet the EAO's purpose and regulatory standards and requirements.

³ [Infrastructure Projects Act Overview](#)

⁴ Currently under development by Ministry of Infrastructure. See <https://engage.gov.bc.ca/infrastructure/eligibility/>



2.3 Proposed Evaluation Criteria for Expedited EA Suitability

To provide an informed recommendation during Step 2 (Assessment) of the IPA Project Designation Process, the EAO will evaluate a project's suitability for an expedited EA. The following proposed criteria identify key technical and relational inputs the EAO proposes to use to inform a recommendation to the Ministry of Infrastructure:

- **Advanced Project Description:** To meet the timelines of an expedited EA, a proponent must provide a stable project description that reflects an advanced conceptual design. The project description must include sufficient information to identify potential interactions with valued components⁵ and First Nation interests. Material design changes, such as substantial footprint expansions, project facility relocation or expansion, or additional linear infrastructure, would result in the project no longer meeting the eligibility criteria for an accelerated timeline.⁶ In such cases, the EAO would adjust the assessment timeline to accommodate the iterative review and discovery of potential project effects required to assess the new design elements. This ensures the technical and procedural requirements of the *Environmental Assessment Act* are upheld and that all potential impacts are rigorously assessed according to provincial standards.
- **Information and data maturity:** At least one full year of seasonal baseline data and technical modelling must be complete and meet published provincial and federal specifications prior to entry into the expedited EA process (supplemental data to refine or confirm impacts or outcomes will likely be required during the process). This allows the EAO to focus on validation of effects rather than the discovery of new information during the expedited EA.
- **Engagement with First Nations:** Proponents must provide a documented record of engagement with all potentially impacted First Nations. This includes demonstrating how the proponent has addressed concerns raised during engagement.

⁵ Valued components are specific environmental, economic, social, cultural and health attributes that may be potentially impacted by a project and are therefore focused on during the environmental assessment. They represent the values the public, First Nations and government agencies consider important.

⁶ *Material design changes* means any *change* to the project description that alters or has the potential to alter the characterization of effects or assessment conclusions relating to significance on valued components or the seriousness of impacts on First Nation rights and effects on interests.



- **Engagement with local communities and local governments:** Proponents must provide a documented record of engagement with all potentially impacted local communities. This includes demonstrating how the proponent has incorporated the concerns shared during engagement.
- **Issue complexity / predictability of effects:** The EAO assesses whether a project's predicted impacts are well understood or if they introduce novel risks that require additional time for review and issues resolution.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

To support an informed recommendation during the Project Designation Process, the EAO is seeking feedback on the proposed evaluation criteria.

- What specific evidence of First Nation and local community support should the EAO verify to ensure all relevant perspectives have been considered before making a recommendation to the Ministry of Infrastructure?
- Beyond the proposed categories, are there other indicators of project readiness that the EAO should evaluate?





3. Proposed Expedited EA

3.1 Overview

The proposed expedited EA is a streamlined 20-month process (see Figure 1, below). A standard EA generally takes between three and five years to complete. The expedited EA is enabled by a shift in the regulatory approach, moving from the iterative, “discovery” model of a standard EA to a validation-based model. A standard EA often involves the discovery of project effects through multiple iterations of design and study. The expedited pathway assumes this discovery prior to starting the assessment. This allows the EAO to focus its assessment activities on validating the proponent’s data and drafting the legally enforceable conditions of an EA Certificate.

Faster timelines also are achieved by streamlining phases and consolidating steps, in a compressed process that preserves B.C.’s environmental protection standards, provides for rigorous review of potential impacts and mitigation measures, and upholds the rights of Indigenous peoples.

3.2 First Nations Participation and Consensus-Seeking

The expedited EA process relies on strong relationships between proponents and impacted First Nations, who also must support the use of this pathway. Because support from significantly and directly impacted First Nations is a requirement for Project Designation, the expedited EA process is built on a collaborative model.

In this model, the EAO, participating Indigenous nations and technical experts conduct a single assessment as the accelerated timelines do not provide the time required for a separate Indigenous-led assessment under section 19(4) of the *Environmental Assessment Act*. Instead, this approach ensures that First Nations’ perspectives are integrated into the provincial assessment from the outset.

Collaboration with First Nations continues to be a critical feature of an expedited EA, with consensus-seeking obligations set at two high-impact milestones:

1. **Process Order:** Establishing the scope, methods and information requirements for the assessment.
2. **Assessment Report:** Reporting on conclusions of the EA and the proposed conditions of the Environmental Assessment Certificate.

Beyond these milestones, the expedited process recognizes First Nations decision-making through the opportunity for participating Indigenous nations to communicate their notice



of consent or lack of consent regarding the issuance of an Environmental Assessment Certificate.

Supporting Consensus-Seeking: The Issues Resolution Protocol

To support consensus-seeking during expedited EA, the EAO proposes an Issues Resolution Protocol that emphasizes early and continuous problem-solving. This relationship-based approach to issue resolution will be designed in collaboration with First Nations partners. It directly reflects the shared priorities identified in the Revising Dispute Resolution in Environmental Assessments: Intentions Paper.⁷

By providing a responsive mechanism to elevate intractable issues directly to leadership, the Protocol prioritizes direct engagement over reliance on lengthier third-party dispute resolution. While primarily supporting consensus-seeking between the EAO and First Nations, the Protocol may involve proponents and technical experts, as needed, to address and close challenging issues as they arise.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Projects must be at an advanced state of readiness to access the expedited EA process, including established positive working relationships between project proponents and potentially impacted First Nations.

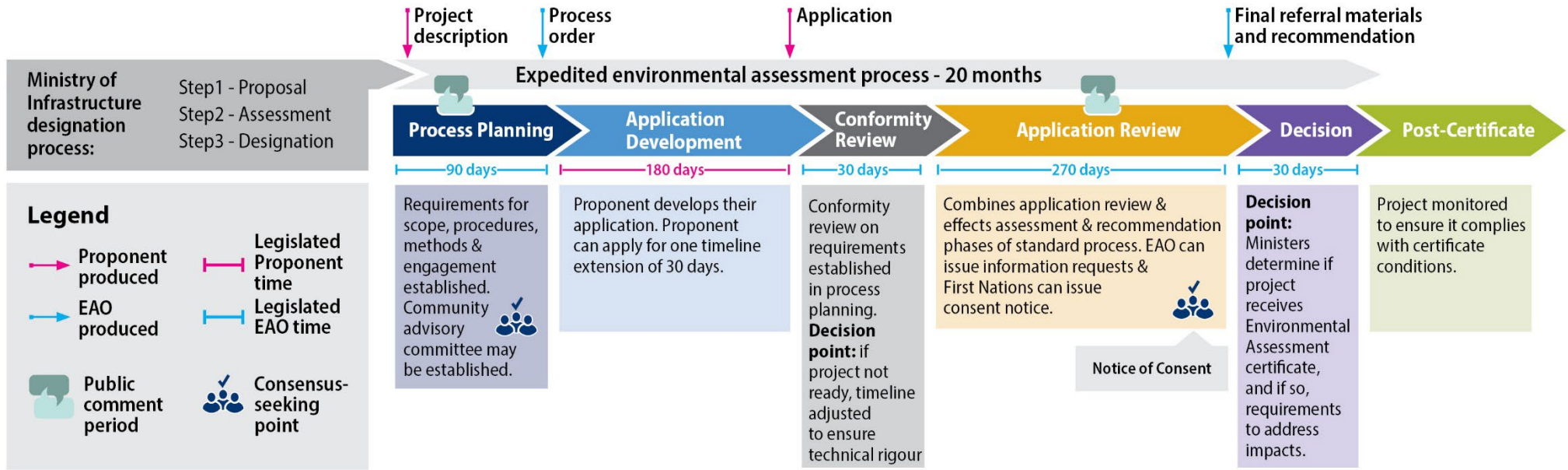
- How can the proponent and/or the EAO ensure that all potentially impacted First Nations are meaningfully informed about the project, and have the opportunity to indicate their support, concern and/or interest in participating?
- Once the expedited EA process begins, what specific opportunities would best enable participating Indigenous nations to collaborate effectively within the expedited timelines and process phases?

This Protocol does not replace or alter the right of participating Indigenous nations to provide a formal notice of consent or non-consent at the end of an expedited EA. It is designed to identify and address lack of consensus early, ensuring that the final Ministerial decision on whether to issue an environmental assessment certificate is informed by a clear and transparent record of issue resolution.

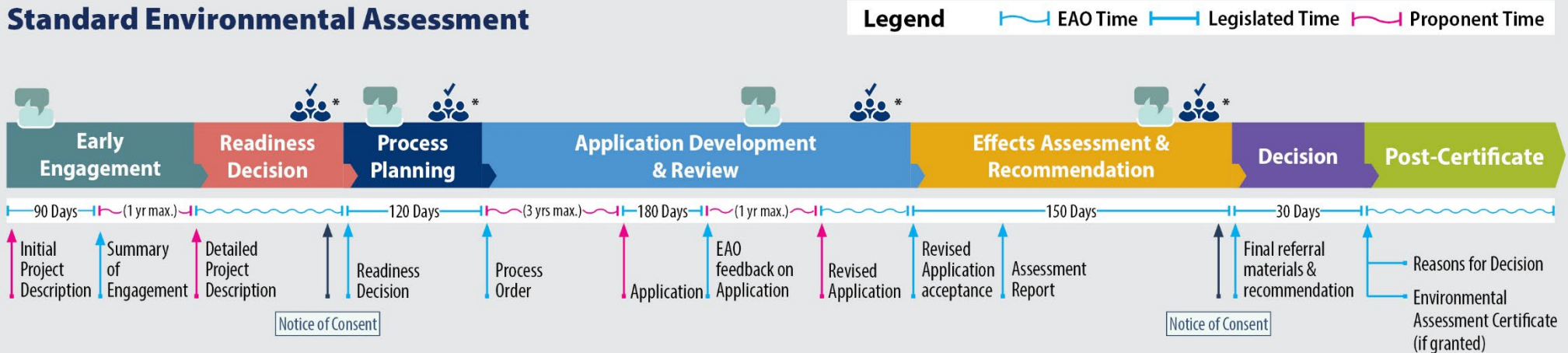
⁷ [Revising Dispute Resolution in Environmental Assessments: Intentions Paper](#)

Figure 1

Proposed Expedited Environmental Assessment



Standard Environmental Assessment



*Note: dispute resolution available at this phase, however changes are expected in spring 2026 to some dispute resolution provisions in the standard process.



3.3 Proposed Expedited EA Process – Phases

To achieve a 20-month timeline, the expedited EA modifies the sequence and structure of a standard assessment (see *Figure 1, above*). This section outlines the proposed modifications to the assessment phases, describing how the steps of the standard EA are consolidated to maintain a rigorous review within accelerated timelines.

This acceleration is primarily enabled by evaluating the suitability of a project for an expedited EA within the IPA Project Designation Process. This alignment ensures that the technical recommendation regarding suitability informs the Minister of Infrastructure's recommendation to Cabinet on whether a designated project is a good candidate for an expedited EA. Because suitability is verified during the IPA Project Designation Process, the Readiness Decision found in the standard EA is not a component of the expedited pathway.

By confirming a project's suitability for an accelerated timeline during the IPA Project Designation Process, the EAO can focus on working with First Nations and other assessment participants on:

- Setting clear information requirements tailored to a project's specific impacts;
- Conducting focused technical assessments on matters salient to First Nations and the public; and,
- Developing robust mitigation measures to address any predicted adverse impacts while enhancing the project's benefits.

Process Planning

In a standard EA, Process Planning (up to 120 days) formalizes the assessment's scope, procedures, methods and information required for an assessment.⁸ Under that process, Section 25 of the *Environmental Assessment Act* prescribes a list of matters that must be considered in every standard EA.⁹

In an expedited EA, Process Planning is proposed to be up to 90 days and only begins once the EAO confirms that a project description is finalized and all necessary data are available. Utilizing the flexibility provided by the Bill 15 amendments to the *Environmental Assessment Act*, the EAO establishes a tailored assessment scope focused on high-risk values and interests. To ensure this tailored approach is responsive to local values and

⁸ Guidance documents available under *Process planning*: [link to EAO website here](#)

⁹ *Environmental Assessment Act*, [Section 25](#)



interests, a targeted 14-day public comment period is held to gather feedback related to project design and location.

This focused period is enabled by the proponent's prior engagement with local communities. As part of Step 2 (Assessment) of the IPA Project Designation Process, the EAO reviews this prior engagement to ensure the public is already familiar with the project's core components before the expedited EA begins.

In the expedited EA, the Process Order serves as the framework or plan for the assessment. In addition to scope and methods, the Process Order defines the Continuation Criteria required to proceed through an expedited EA. These criteria set performance standards for proponents. If a proponent is unable to meet these criteria, they will not be able to proceed with their assessment at an accelerated pace. This ensures the technical and relational aspects of the EA are not negatively impacted, so as to maintain sound environmental protections and consultation obligations with First Nations.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The expedited EA allows the EAO to tailor engagement tools to a project's specific context.

- What tools, opportunities and/or notifications would you suggest to ensure public comment windows remain a meaningful opportunity to gather information and input from local communities?

The expedited EA requires that a proponent maintains an advanced state of readiness. To ensure the integrity of the expedited EA, there must be a clear accountability mechanism for maintaining a stable project design and high-quality data.

- Beyond a stable project description, what other performance standards (e.g., responsiveness to information requests) are essential for a project to be assessed on an expedited timeline?





Application Development

In a standard EA, Application Development and Review is an iterative process where proponents have up to three years to conduct primary studies, refine project design, engage with participating Indigenous nations and stakeholders, and submit their application.¹⁰

In the expedited EA, this phase is proposed to be up to 180 days. Because this process is reserved for projects in a state of advanced readiness, proponents are expected to have completed all necessary baseline data collection, technical modelling and collaboration with First Nations prior to the issuance of the Process Order.

Consequently, the Application Development phase focuses on the finalization and synthesis of existing information rather than the initiation of new primary studies. This phase serves to ensure that all information requirements identified in the Process Order are met with high-quality, pre-existing data. To maintain expedited EA timelines, the proponent must meet the Continuation Criteria established in the Process Order.

Conformity Review (proposed new phase)

Because the expedited EA requires projects to maintain a state of advanced readiness to ensure a robust assessment within accelerated timelines, the EAO is proposing a formal Conformity Review. During this phase, the EAO verifies that the proponent continues to meet all Continuation Criteria established in the Process Order. This includes confirming a stable project footprint and conformity of all technical data and consultation records with provincial standards.

If an Application does not meet the Continuation Criteria, the EAO will extend the assessment timeline to accommodate the iterative review and discovery of potential project effects required to resolve information gaps. This ensures that all potential impacts are rigorously assessed according to provincial standards. Because the expedited EA does not provide for the iterative information requests common in a standard EA, this phase validates the Application's completeness and technical sufficiency.

The aim is to ensure the EAO, participating Indigenous nations and the Technical Advisory Committee have the high-quality information required to conduct a thorough assessment of potential project effects without the delays of information requests or design changes.

¹⁰ See guidance documents under *Application development and review*: [Guidance & Policy Materials](#)





Application Review (Combined Application Review & Effects Assessment)

In a standard EA, Application Review and Effects Assessment are sequential phases totaling up to 330 days. This sequential approach is often necessary to address information deficiencies and iterative application revisions.

The expedited EA consolidates these stages into a single 270-day phase. This shift is enabled by the validation-based model: because project readiness is verified during the IPA Project Designation Process and Conformity Review, the EAO proceeds with the understanding that the Application is technically sufficient and will not require major revisions. During this consolidated phase, the EAO will:

- **Execute Concurrent Reviews:** Technical review of the Application occurs simultaneously with the drafting of the Assessment Report and conditions in the Certificate that would mitigate adverse impacts if the project is approved.
- **Integrate Public Input:** A 30-day Public Comment Period early in the phase ensures that community feedback directly informs the draft report on the assessment of project effects and proposed mitigation measures.
- **Collaborate on Document Drafting:** The Technical Advisory Committee and participating Indigenous nations work alongside the EAO to assess effects and finalize legally enforceable conditions in real-time.
- **Seek Consensus:** The EAO seeks consensus with participating Indigenous nations on the Assessment Report and draft conditions, while maintaining First Nations statutory right to provide a notice of consent or non-consent.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

A public comment period is proposed at the start of Application Review.

- How should the EAO report back during the Application Review Phase to show how early feedback shaped the final EA Certificate conditions?
- How can the EAO better leverage a project's advanced readiness to remove procedural barriers and streamline the assessment while ensuring rigorous technical analysis and meaningful participation?



Ministerial Decision

In the final phase of a standard EA, the statutory decision-makers (the Minister of Environment and Parks and a second minister in the relevant sector) determine whether or not a project should receive an Environmental Assessment Certificate. In the proposed expedited EA, this 30-day window for the Ministers decision remains the same as the standard process.

Within this 30-day period, the Ministers determine if the project is in the public interest. Specifically, the Ministers will:

- **Review the Assessment Report** and the EAO's conclusions regarding the project effects;
- **Review the Proposed Conditions**, legally enforceable requirements designed to mitigate adverse impacts in the event the project is approved to proceed;
- **Weigh the Perspectives of First Nations**, including any formal notices of consent or lack of consent;
- **Determine whether to issue an EA Certificate**, and finalize the conditions under which the project must be constructed, operated and decommissioned; and
- **Provide a Public Statement of Reasons** for their decision.

It is important to note that the expedited EA pathway is a procedural mechanism to increase efficiency – it does not guarantee a specific decision or project approval. The Ministers retain full discretion and will base their decision on the same rigorous criteria to protect the environment, communities and First Nations rights as in a standard EA, following a thorough consideration of the Assessment Report, the record of consensus-seeking with First Nations and input from technical advisors and the public.

Post-certificate

For projects authorized through the expedited EA pathway, the level of post-decision compliance oversight remains unchanged from the standard EA process. The "expedited" designation applies strictly to the EA timeline. It does not result in any reduction in the standards of compliance monitoring and enforcement during construction and operations if an Environmental Assessment Certificate is issued.



4. Conclusion and Next Steps

4.1 Summary of the Proposed Process

By designating projects that demonstrate advanced readiness and a commitment to early issues resolution, the Province can provide a streamlined regulatory track without compromising oversight. This proposed pathway is designed to deliver an environmental assessment in approximately 20 months, while preserving the technical and procedural integrity of British Columbia's EA framework. Essential milestones remain central to the process, including:

- **Rigorous Technical Assessment:** Ensuring all potential effects are understood.
- **Project-Specific Requirements:** Tailoring the scope to high-priority values.
- **Legally Enforceable Conditions:** Developing robust mitigation measures.
- **Post-Certificate Compliance:** Maintaining oversight throughout the project lifecycle.

Utilizing the IPA Project Designation Process to determine readiness, the Province ensures that only projects prepared for a validation-based assessment can access the expedited EA. This ensures the evaluation of environmental, social, economic, cultural and health factors remain at the forefront of every decision.

4.2 How to Participate and Next Steps

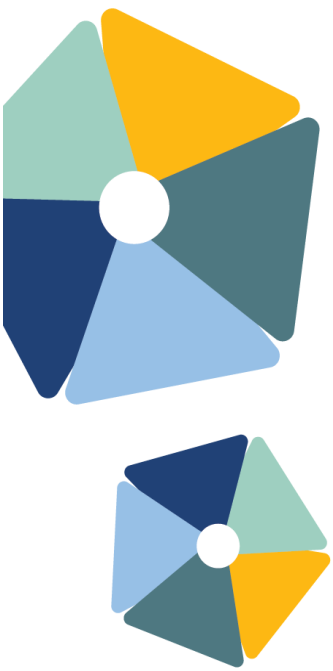
This discussion paper invites feedback on the proposed expedited EA process. The EAO looks forward to conversations with First Nations and other participants in environmental assessments to further develop a process that considers the values and priorities of all partners and meets the outcomes it was intended to achieve.

The EAO will consult and cooperate with First Nations and engage with industry, EA practitioners, local governments, provincial regulators and others interested in EA to develop a regulation for the expedited process. You can provide input by:

- providing written submissions to EAO.ActReview@gov.bc.ca
- participating in virtual engagement sessions; and/or
- attending bilateral meetings.

Visit <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/environmental-assessments/environmental-assessment-process/act-review> for ongoing updates.

Learn more about the Act Review or get in touch



Website:

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