NOPSEMA | Australia's offshore energy regulator

Consultation on offshore petroleum environment plans

Information for the community



The National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA) is Australia's independent expert regulator for health and safety, structural and well integrity, and environmental management for offshore petroleum and greenhouse gas storage activities in Commonwealth waters.

The protection and preservation of the marine environment is best achieved when there are opportunities for the community to participate in the environmental approvals process through consultation.

Who can participate?

Under the Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Environment) Regulations 2023 (the regulations) there are several ways the community can participate in the environmental approvals process for offshore petroleum activities in Commonwealth waters.

Public comment for new projects and exploration activities

Offshore project proposals (OPPs) for new offshore petroleum projects and environment plans for offshore petroleum exploration activities are subject to a mandatory public comment period. Public comment must be done before the OPP or environment plan is submitted to NOPSEMA for assessment. Further information about public comment can be found at nopsema.gov.au.

Relevant persons consultation

Titleholders must consult with a specific category of people or organisations referred to as 'relevant persons' while preparing an environment plan for any offshore petroleum activity. This consultation must be done before the environment plan is submitted to NOPSEMA.

Some categories of relevant persons are specified in the regulations, such as government departments, however the information in this brochure is for the category of relevant persons who are not specified but who have 'functions, interests or activities' that may be affected by the offshore activity.

Correspondence directly to the regulator (NOPSEMA)

You can send correspondence directly to NOPSEMA; however, this generally cannot be considered until after the environment plan has been submitted. It is always better to use the public comment and relevant persons consultation processes in the first instance.

What is 'relevant persons' consultation?

Consultation on offshore petroleum activities is a two-way process where information is shared between titleholders and relevant persons. It is a requirement for titleholders when preparing an environment plan and is an important part of good environmental management.

Consultation provides an opportunity for people or organisations who may be affected by an offshore petroleum activity to raise concerns, including objections or claims, about the potential impacts of the activity, to seek information about how they may be affected, and how the titleholder intends to manage the activity to ensure the associated impacts are as low as reasonably practicable and are acceptable.

Information provided by relevant persons in consultation may also help titleholders better understand the values and sensitivities of the environment and inform the evaluation of the potential impacts and risks associated with the activity and how to manage them appropriately.

Am I a relevant person?

You may be a relevant person if you or your organisation have functions, interests, or activities that may be affected by an offshore petroleum activity proposed under an environment plan being prepared or already underway under an environment plan being revised.

The terms 'functions' 'interests' and 'activities' should be read broadly. You do not have to have a legal or financial interest that may be affected by an offshore petroleum activity to be a relevant person.

Interests that may be affected can include things like cultural and spiritual connections to the sea or interests in the protection of specific marine species. However, to be a relevant person your interests should be more than a general interest in the environment and/or offshore petroleum activities.

If I am a representative body, can I consult on behalf of all my members?

The law recognises that interests may be held communally. In some cases, all members of a community may agree that their representative body can consult on their behalf. However, this may not always be the case. Representative bodies should inform titleholders whether or not they have the authority to consult with titleholders on behalf of all their members.

Representative bodies, such as peak bodies and prescribed body corporates, may be relevant persons in their own right. They may also be an initial point of contact for titleholders to seek information about who else they should approach for consultation.

It is the titleholder's responsibility to provide all members of a community who have a shared interest opportunities to participate in consultation. In some circumstances, representative bodies may offer to assist titleholders with this.

Do I have to participate?

If you are a relevant person, you have the right to be consulted by titleholders of offshore petroleum activities when they are preparing an environment plan to submit to NOPSEMA.

Titleholders have a duty to provide you an opportunity to be consulted, however there is no obligation on you to participate in consultation. If you do not wish to be consulted, you should advise titleholders of this when they first contact you.

Titleholders must make reasonable efforts to consult with relevant persons, but the regulations do not require them to get a response to their requests. If you want to participate in consultation but need more information or time then it is best to communicate this to titleholders when they contact you. If you do not respond, they might assume you do not wish to be consulted.

If you are an organisation or representative body that is regularly approached for consultation you may consider developing guidance outlining how and when you want to be consulted. You could also consider documenting your functions, interests and activities. Both measures may help with managing regular requests for consultation.

In some instances, the likelihood of you being affected by an activity is very low and/or the impact on your functions, interests or activities may be minor. For example, if you are only going to be affected by the activity in the very unlikely event of an oil spill you may wish to inform titleholders you only want to be consulted if a spill occurs as part of the requirement for ongoing consultation set out in the regulations.



What if I want to be consulted but the titleholder hasn't contacted me?

Titleholders have a duty to identify who may be a relevant person and provide them opportunities to participate in consultation. However, even with best endeavors, titleholders may miss people or organisations who may be relevant.

If you believe you are a relevant person and you want to be consulted on offshore petroleum activities, then you should contact titleholders directly and identify yourself as a relevant person.

If a titleholder refuses to consult with you, and you believe you are a relevant person, you can write to NOPSEMA. Once an environment plan is submitted to NOPSEMA, this information can be considered in the assessment of whether or not the titleholder has met the requirements for consultation.

It is always better to attempt to resolve issues with the titleholder in the first instance. Relevant persons consultation is carried out before an environment plan is submitted, so NOPSEMA is limited in its ability to require titleholders to consult with a particular person or organisation.

What is the process for consultation?

There is no detailed process set out for how consultation should be carried out, however there are requirements that must be met under the regulations. These include:

- That you are given sufficient information to make an informed assessment about whether you are likely to be affected by the activity, how you may be affected, and to raise any concerns, including objections or claims, about the potential impacts of the activity.
- That you are given a reasonable period of time to consider the information provided to you and give feedback to the titleholder on the potential impacts of the activity on your functions, interests or activities.

What constitutes sufficient information and a reasonable period of time depends on several factors including the nature of your functions, interests and activities. You should communicate as early as possible in consultation with titleholders about what information and how much time you may need so that they can consider, respond and address these in their planning.

The information provided to you should be in a form that is appropriate and readily accessible to you. Consultation is generally a two-way process where information is shared between titleholders and relevant persons rather than a one-way process of seeking feedback to a fact sheet or high-level information.



What if I don't have the resources to participate?

If you are a relevant person and you believe you have information that is important to the understanding of the potential impacts of an offshore petroleum activity or you want to raise concerns, including objections or claims, then you should discuss with the titleholder how you can participate in consultation.

This might include requesting information in a different format, asking for more time to consider information or help to understand the information to provide an informed response.

There is no requirement in the law for titleholders to pay the costs incurred by relevant persons to be consulted, however they may choose to provide assistance to relevant persons to ensure consultation is carried out efficiently and is robust. This is a matter between the titleholder and relevant persons.

How do I make sure my views are considered?

It is important to communicate clearly when participating in consultation with titleholders. You may provide information to titleholders that helps them understand the environment and raise specific concerns, objections or claims about the potential impacts of the activity or the way the titleholder proposes to manage the activity to ensure the associated impacts are as low as reasonably practicable and are acceptable.

The information you provide to a titleholder during consultation must be considered by that titleholder and addressed in their environment plan for NOPSEMA to consider in its assessment and decision-making.

NOPSEMA publishes environment plans on its website when they are submitted for public comment, for assessment and when they are approved. Relevant persons have the right to request that the information they have provided in consultation is not published and titleholders must ensure they communicate this right to relevant persons.

Relevant persons should be aware that while you are free to respond on any matter and raise any concern, this may not be able to be considered if it is outside the scope or purpose of the environment plan and approval process. Examples of issues that may not be considered under the regulations include statements of fundamental objection to offshore petroleum activities or information containing personal threats or profanities.

Do titleholders need my consent?

Titleholders are not required by law to obtain agreement or consent from relevant persons for their offshore petroleum activities to proceed; however, they are required to demonstrate in their environment plan how the concerns, objections or claims raised by relevant persons were considered and demonstrate that their response to that information was appropriate.

NOPSEMA's assessment and decision-making will consider if titleholders have adequately demonstrated in the environment plan that genuine consultation has taken place with relevant persons in accordance with regulations.

Do I need to respond to a request for consultation?

There is no obligation for relevant persons to respond to a request for consultation from a titleholder. However, if you are provided an opportunity to participate in consultation and you do not want to be consulted, or you only want to be consulted on specific offshore petroleum activities or environmental matters, then it is best that you communicate this to titleholders as soon as they contact you. If you do not respond to requests for consultation, titleholders may make many repeated attempts to contact you.

NOPSEMA can help you understand the requirements for consultation and how to effectively participate in the process. Please contact communications@nopsema.gov.au for assistance.

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Further information

For further information visit nopsema.gov.au or contact communications@nopsema.gov.au.

Key legislation

Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2006
Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage (Environment) Regulations 2023
Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

Contact details

p: +61 (08) 6188 8700
e: communications@nopsema.gov.au

Head office: Level 10, Alluvion Building
58 Mounts Bay Road, Perth WA 6000

Postal: GPO Box 2568 - Level 10 58 Mounts Bay Road, Perth WA 6000

nopsema.gov.au

National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA)

ABN 22 385 178 289

Published May 2023