

14 April 2016

Executive Director,
Resource Assessments & Business Systems,
Department of Planning and Environment,
GPO Box 39,
Sydney NSW 2001

PIA submission on revised Community Consultative Committee Guidelines

The Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the Revised Community Consultative Committee Guidelines.

The Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) is the peak body representing professionals involved in planning Australian cities, towns and regions. The Institute has around 5000 members nationally and around 1200 members in New South Wales. PIA NSW plays key roles in promoting and supporting the planning profession within NSW and advocating at all levels in relation to key planning and public policy issues.

PIA supports the principle that Community Consultative Committees play an important role in the assessment and regulation of State-significant projects by providing a forum for open discussions between companies, communities and local councils about the project.

The Institute is pleased that these Guidelines are now to apply to a range of State Significant Projects, not only mining projects, and accepts that not all projects will require a consultative committee and most will have a limited life.

However, we are concerned with the changes proposed for the way in which committee members are to be appointed. The Institute, like the State Government, is committed to openness and fairness in the planning system and for it to be perceived as such. While we acknowledge the guidance and criteria which it is intended to put into place for the operation of these committees, we believe that the current draft changes may not be seen to reflect this transparency.

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The purpose of a community consultative committee is to provide a forum for open discussion, and to establish good working relationships, between representatives of the company, the community, the council and other stakeholders on issues directly relating to a project's operations, environmental performance and community relations, and to keep the community informed on these matters.

It would appear from the revised Guidelines that the Independent Chair will be selected by the Department but principally from people nominated by the proponents who will most certainly only nominate people sympathetic to their proposal. Such a process is unlikely to give the perception of an unbiased appointment.

The Chairperson will then nominate community members for endorsement by the Department, thereby furthering the perception of bias. Whilst this may have the advantage of leading to a more harmonious working of the committee it could also lead to considerable opposition from those stakeholders who feel disenfranchised, thus negating the whole purpose of the exercise.

PIA respectfully suggests that there be an alternative method for selecting an Independent Chair. An option could be that the Department maintains a pool of potential appointees, independently sourced and who could be drawn from for appointment.

The Institute is happy to elaborate on any of the matters covered in this submission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Marjorie Ferguson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large 'M' and a long, sweeping underline.

Marjorie Ferguson MPIA CPP
President NSW Division